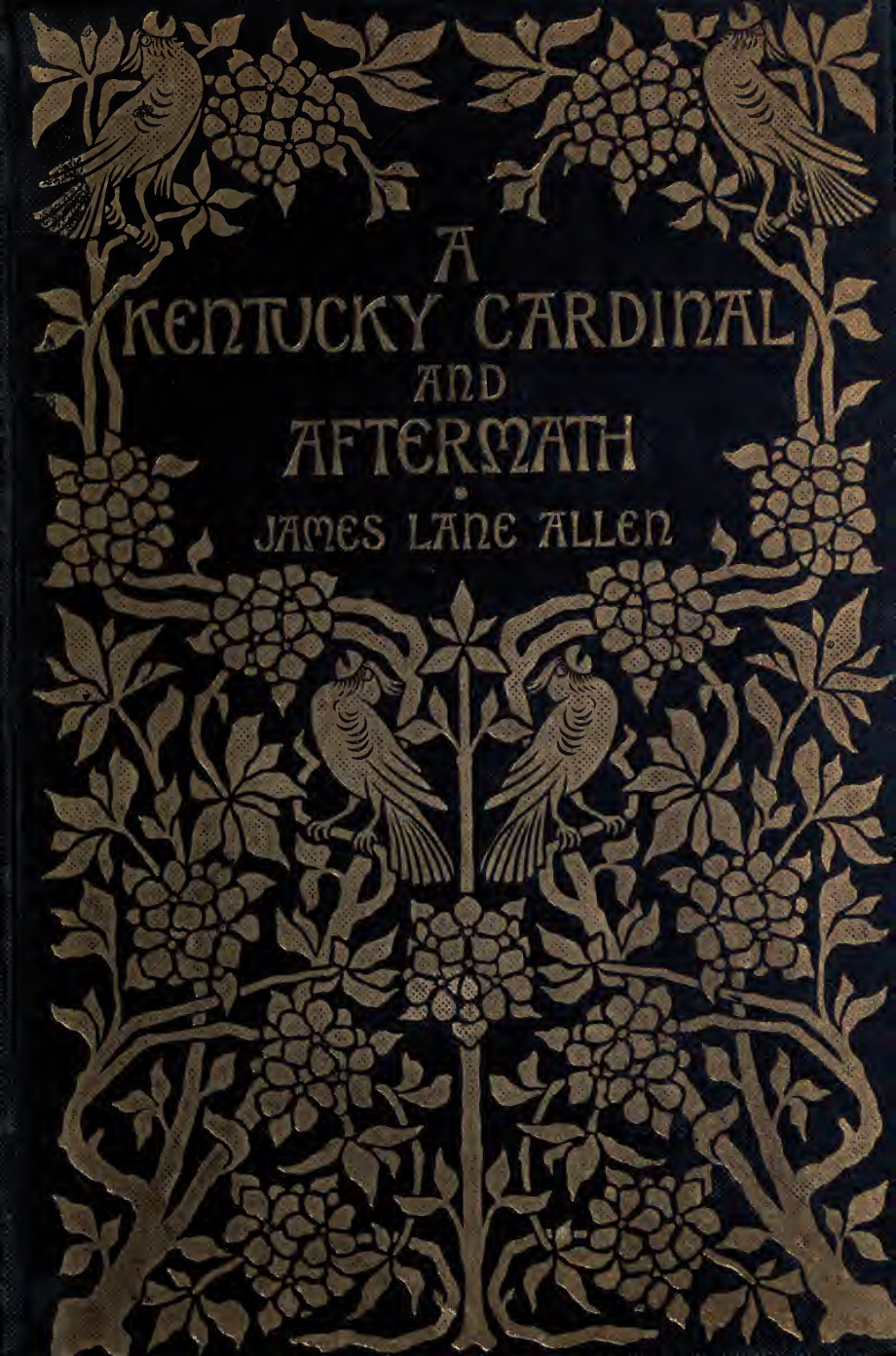
A KENTUCKY CARDINAL AND AFTERMATH

JAMES LANE ALLEN



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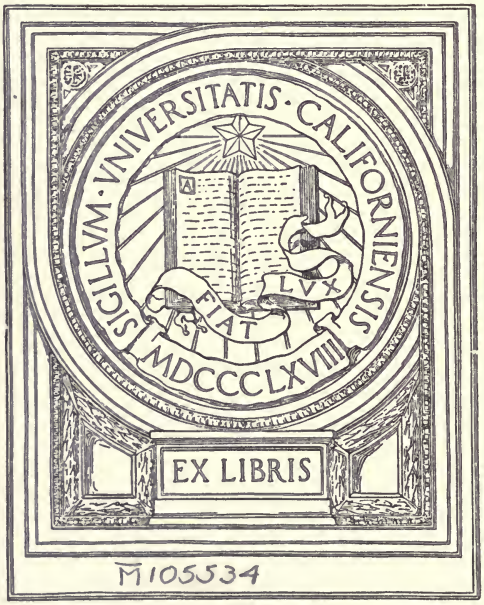
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A KENTUCKY CARDINAL

AND

AFTERMATH

She could see out of only one eye.

P. 209.

MESSRS. MACMILLAN & CO., LTD., will be glad to receive a copy of the issue containing a notice of this work.

The price of the book is 6/-

A Kentucky Cardinal

AND

Aftermath

BY

JAMES LANE ALLEN

AUTHOR OF 'THE CHOIR INVISIBLE,' ETC.

With Illustrations by

HUGH THOMSON

London

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Dedication

This to her from one who in childhood used to stand at the windows of her room and watch for the Cardinal among the snow-buried cedars.

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INTRODUCTION

HE first thing in life that I can remember is the fact of being caught up into somebody's arms and of owning a blue tumbler. Possibly when that gigantic person —whoever it was—seized me by my two handles, I seized my tumbler by its one handle; and thus the glass and the caress stayed bound together in my memory as parts of the same commotion. But I can never evoke these ill-assorted beginnings of all conscious recollection without being also obliged to think of a pump on a slippery hill with a brick pavement around it: and a pump and a tumbler and being suddenly snatched off the earth suggest some true story of the times. But, then again, it is impossible to recall the image of this pump without instantly dragging into view the

head and shoulders of a smiling school-teacher, who held me in his arms and who had the power to give away sweet morsels—on that occasion; and why he *should appear so early in the procession of small knowledge—indeed, at the azoic head of it—may be a secret not worth discovering, but it is at least quite certain that no one will ever discover it.*

Most likely, these several things, which are now beheld as compressed into a single scene and instant, existed far apart through time and place. A year arrived when caresses began to be conscious experience; in another I entered upon the ownership of a cerulean mug; during a third my explorations of the physical world extended to the pump in the yard —for one stood there; on some day of a fourth I may have been led across the woods to the schoolhouse on the mud road—perhaps some Friday afternoon, when it was customary to have spelling matches, or dialogues and speeches, and when parents came and refreshments—the arrival of the refreshments being much more important than that of the parents. Be the truth as it may, the matters set down above are all that I can remember on my own account about my birthplace and my earliest years. They are filaments of the obscurest algæ, gathered around the coasts of that dim, deep sea which is a child's

mind and now resembling nothing so much as a barely traceable bunch of outlines pressed on one small card.

After this everything vanishes — tumbler and teacher, pump and pudding. There is an upheaval, or a downfall; and when Memory begins again the weaving of that long seamless living tapestry wherefrom she has never rested and whereon she is busy yet, I was about two miles away. My father had moved with his family to a farm that had been left to him by his father and entailed for the benefit of us, his children; and there I continued to live until I was twenty-two years of age, without ever having been outside the state of Kentucky or having seen more than once or twice any but the nearest village.

The farm to which the scene now shifts was small. I was the last of seven children; and during the forerunning years of his married life my father, who was of a most generous, unselfish, and trustful nature, had met with reverses; both his and my mother's independent fortunes were gone. This piece of property represented a fragment of his father's estate, just as his father's estate represented but a fragment of the wilderness lands of a pioneer settler. On it stood a brick house of the Virginia

pattern—a very good one for the time at which it had been built. In its original shape it consisted of that part which was two stories high; but later (I do not know when or by whom) there had been added at the southern end an ell containing, besides a pantry and a kitchen, one chamber, the largest room in the house.

This was occupied by my father and mother. Thus, in accordance with the common custom of the country in those days, it became the general living-room of the family. Its two good-sized windows opened upon the front yard. One of these was kept closed, because the bed sat against it; the other was regularly closed at nightfall, and regularly opened the first thing in the morning.

In this room, then, and at this window begins the history of my outdoor life. There my impressions of the physical world took earliest shape and meaning; whatsoever unimportant habits of observation I may possess were there formed, directed, and rewarded; and if I have ever written anything concerning Nature which shows the slightest knowledge or feeling—if in far later years I have ever lingered over a page, vainly trying to put upon it the reality of external things as they seem to us, and the reality of the emotions they arouse in

us — the origin of it all goes back to that time and place.

Of the other portions of the house, any account would enter but unprofitably into the purpose of these recollections. True, I early acquired excellent information regarding the pantry next door. It was full of things that once had been in Nature, but were soon to be in Man. And in Me. Substances piled up, simply waiting to be taken in: why keep them waiting? It was one of the places in which a boy sometimes lengthens his life and sometimes shortens it, but where meantime he invariably broadens his information and his body. The truth, in any case, would be of no value except as a warning, and there is never anybody to take the warning. Of the kitchen also, adjoining the pantry — those twin hostelries of little pattering feet—I have recollections that go fairly back to Chaos; but neither have these anything to do with that one especial end in view, which further on perhaps may kindly justify these frank and unexpected personalities. As for the other rooms—the dining-room, the parlour, the bedrooms upstairs, and the enormous garret above these—each in time grew discoverable and definite to my spreading intelligence until at last I could grasp the entire house as a mental whole, consisting of many orderly

and separately interesting parts. But their several diverse histories began later; and none opened for me an eye through which to look out upon the physical world.

So that there was but one: the window in my father's and mother's room, that single observatory for a delicate child kept much indoors and having no playmates. At this instant, as I test the matter in consciousness, I possess not a single recollection of this window in summer or of anything I ever saw from it during that season: which means no doubt that then I was never there. But from the first chill days of autumn when the white window-sash was lowered, and doors were shut, and a fire was kindled on the hearth—from that time until late spring, when the sash was thrown up again and doors were set open and the fireplace was white-washed for the summer, with a bag of straw rammed up the chimney to keep back soot and swallows—the memories of what I looked out upon through that window are so thick that in all the years since I have never exhausted them, and I have but to develop some unused film of memory to find fresh ones at any moment.

It has been said that the first thing in the morning the shutters were thrown open. How often, as

soon as this was done, would my mother call to me and direct my attention to something of interest. Perhaps to the window-panes themselves, silvered and sparkling with frost. What a wonder and a mystery to a child's eyes! Those landscapes which had settled in a night across his crystal path of vision and now shut out all others! Until they were melted away by his hot breath, or scratched through with a small curious finger-nail. Sometimes it was as though the distant wood with all its boughs and avenues had thrown its image towards the house—not across the sunlight, but under cover of the darkness—and this image had been intercepted at the window and fastened there in ice.

About thirty yards away stood a row of large cedar-trees, the well-nigh universal evergreen in Kentucky front yards at that period, for nurseries were scarce, and a fir, a larch, a juniper, or the like was difficult or impossible to get. How often she called to me, on going to the window herself, to look out at these cedars! At the first snow, piled lightly on the boughs; at a male cardinal, sitting on a pinnacle of white and green; at some great sleet, bending them to the earth, rigid and shapeless. It was she who introduced me to the subject of birds.

Thus, shut up in a rather lonely farmhouse

with my back to the fire, I learned to send my eyes abroad and to live out of doors with sun and cloud, storm and calm, throughout three-quarters of the year.

These window observations went on during many returning seasons. Long before they had ceased, they were overlapped by other lines of experience begun outside the house. First in the yard itself; and has the mature mind ever been able to describe how vast a world a large country yard is to a child? A summer day there was longer than is the man's brief life; one corner of it more distant from another than continent from continent to his measuring eyes. In the yard I could draw near to many things which I had been obliged to observe from a distance. I could follow them up, lay hold on them, play the mischief. For one thing: I could run, at winter twilights, out to the cedar-trees and seizing a low bough, shake it and scatter the birds settled down for the night; thus driving them from tree to tree, backward and forward, their cries growing always more distressing in the darkness: a wonderfully interesting piece of business to me for some unknown devilish reason. And then there was the first trap, and the first wild, fluttering captive after breakfast some morning. And when the blue

grass with orchard grass mixed in it was at its highest, not yet having been mowed, and the cold showers of early June left the tops dripping and bowed down, out of the depths here and there issued all day the cries of the young, fallen from the nest or unable to rise on callow wing out of that chill forest of stems. A fine chance for adventures and a place where a boy can learn to hate cats—and never afterwards get over his aversion.

Passing on, I must yet pause to say that on a Kentucky farm in those days a child was surrounded by a prodigal bird life of which but traces remain. My earliest recollections of daybreak are now condensed into one surviving impression: that of hearing all round my father's house, beating close to the walls and surging faintly and more faintly away in every direction, such a sea of song as I think can no longer visit human ears. Of mornings I was often called out of the house to look at the sky, across which wild geese were flying (I can still hear the cry of the leaders up there—that highest melody of earth). Or far outnumbering these, wild ducks; or outnumbering the wild ducks a myriad to one, the wild pigeons—now entirely gone. Sometimes the flocks of these dappled for hours the low gray sky over one entire quarter of the heavens: passing,

passing, passing. At other times — a strangely beautiful sight — flying high on a clear frosty morning and spread far out in a thin straight line, they passed under the zenith like a moving arch. A procession of arches! one after another, all borne in the same direction — a single instinct in ten thousand breasts. They were visiting still the vast oak forests of Kentucky. The whole land lay across the ancient paths of migration. Strange species now and then crossed also. I can remember that my father, who was a capital shot, standing one day in his stable lot, winged an immense sea-fowl that fluttered far down on a neighbour's estate. He went for it and brought it home; but not he nor any one else knew the name of it.

Outside the yard, on every side there lay for me as a child the wonderful universe of the farm. I early began to make the acquaintance of this by sitting on the pommel before my father as he rode over it on his gaited saddle horse. Later I began to ride behind him, thank heavens! where there was no upward horn-like projection to be perched on, but where I could straddle a real soft, fat, living back. There was such a difference between riding on a pommel and riding off of it. My father knew the names of all trees of the land and their

varieties; and of weed and grass and shrub. He had his wonderful practical knowledge direct from his father, as his father had drawn his from the foregoing pioneer settler; and thus in the person of my father I touched in some small way that marvellous utilitarian woodcraft possessed by the western frontiersman.

Through my father also came the earliest knowledge of the fields. I possess no mental picture of him older than that of the sowing of hempseed. He sat on his saddle horse, whose ears he had tied over with his handkerchief to keep the seed from falling into them. Backward and forward, backward and forward, across the soft brown earth he rode, sowing the hemp. And through him there was brought into my life perhaps the most wholesome idea and lesson that has ever entered it,—that of getting down to hard work; and that whatsoever work my hand undertook, to rest not until it was done and done with thoroughness. Both he and my mother were of inexorable thoroughness and particularity in all their lives. I have never followed their example but with outward profit and inward peace, nor neglected it without loss of both of these.

What I have now come to and am trying to

say is that everything I was set to do, from the beginning to the end of all my small labours on the farm, brought indispensable knowledge; kept me close to the earth; caused me to know more of the infinite life of out-of-doors.

I dropped corn, covered it, thinned it (an abominable business, I thought, working a boy's body as though he were a pair of sugar-tongs). Sometimes I shucked it in autumn, threw the fodder over to the stock in winter, took the corn to the mill in the spring—and took my share of the bread at all seasons. I followed the cradles, and shocked oats and wheat, and helped haul the oats to the barn, and the wheat to the stack. And who can do these things without learning a little about the natural history of fields? I cut weeds in the woodland pasture (what Kentucky boy of those times but looked bitterly forward from year to year to the weed-cutting season, and connected weeds with the original curse of the earth—regularly adding an original one unknown to Moses). I cut weeds along fences and in stable lots: on the whole I think I knew weeds pretty well. For several springs I helped to cut the willows for tying the vines in my father's large vineyard. I charred the ends of the stakes over which these vines were to grow,

hoed the vines, thinned out superfluous leaves, gathered the grapes for the press, racked the wine in the cellar—and sometimes the wine racked me. I prepared the ground for the sowing of vegetable seeds and cultivated the plants after they came up: surely I was made to master the business of gardening. Sometimes when a tree was felled in the woods, I collected the brush into a pile and afterwards burnt the brush and my breeches. I cut wood for the house at the wood-pile. At the stable I fed the stock: what is there did I not learn about a barn and its kind faithful souls?

On the whole, though I was never a hard-worked, hard-pressed boy, there dwelt in the minds of parents of those days the stalwart, sturdy idea that when business stops the devil begins; and my parents evidently did not wish him to begin. It appeared to me that when they did not keep me busy, they kept me moving: they sent me on errands to the neighbours—presumably an amusement for the young. In this way, as I now know, I began to extend my knowledge of woods and fields and pathways beyond the farm. Furthermore, one of my regular occupations (another amusement) was to hunt the turkeys. But long before I started out with the idea of finding the turkeys, the turkeys had started out with the

idea of not being found by anybody. Apparently they refused grasshoppers until they had reached a place where they had no right to eat them. What wanderings and searchings they originated! And no sooner did they perceive that they were discovered than they began to run cheerfully home—zealously pushing each other out of the way—as though they had never intended to leave it and were only too glad to return. But they did this every day, and I was not inclined to believe them. It is more to the purpose to record how during these hours of roaming over the summer and autumn land, I received unconscious lessons regarding it through every busy sense.

And then there were the child's pleasures of wood and stream and field, during which more knowledge was gotten through sheer joy alone—the best way: for as you cannot buy joy, neither can you buy the truth that always attends it. Wring out of the heart of a man the last essence of his knowledge of a country, and it will be the scenes of boyhood pleasures. Call on him for his best remembrance of an orchard; and it will be something like this: an afternoon in late autumn when he had climbed the fence of one, during a long hunt, his tongue parched and his stomach empty. But not an apple was to be found:

it was too late: they had all been knocked or gathered. Ah! there was a splendid one, caught in the fork of a limb; or kicking about among the leaves, he found two, one on top of the other, besides a sprout of blackberry in deep grass near the edge of the limbs; or, in a little hollow of the ground, he spied a third with a bee hole on one side of it; a wet leaf stuck to the other and a little white mould under it.

Through work and errand and pleasure, then, I was ever learning. As I grew older other things helped to furrow habits more deeply. The school to which I was sent lay across the country; and morning and afternoon that country must be traversed. The neighbourhood church lay several miles off in another. When I entered college, through part of each year I walked back and forth—several miles, across the country still. So that by the end of that time and as the end of it all, I had learned some little about Nature in a neighbourhood.

One fact is not to be overlooked: that I should probably have learned less, had the neighbourhood contained more children. Of course this neighbourhood contained its children, otherwise it would not have been one. But there were some families with whom we did not exchange visits. I had whole

groups and flocks of cousins, away off below the horizon, in two or three directions; but I saw them too seldom—to my sorrow. Then there were much older boys far ahead of me and babies everywhere behind me—no trouble about babies. But at a certain period there seemed to have been a lull, and during that lull I was born. So that strictly I had no adjacent contemporaries. Undoubtedly this had its effect—this absence of companionship: it often led me to follow the negroes into the fields, where as one result I watched the hemp through all its changes. Another result, more important by far for me, was the dependence it created upon other things for play, study, interest, activity, curiosity, affection. So that the other inhabitants of my world—domestic fowls, dumb brutes, birds, creatures of the woods—took measurably from the first the place of the human species. There has never been reason to regret these universal childhood friendships: none of them has ever been broken: they mean more the longer they last.

In so far as literature is concerned these same experiences taught me, and have always compelled me, to see human life as set in Nature: finding its explanation in soil and sky and season: merely one of the wild growths that spring up on the surface

of the earth amid ten thousand others. I hold this to be the only true way in which to write of Man in fiction, as it is in science. I further hold it to be true that if a writer is ever to have that knowledge of a country which reappears in his work as local colour, he must have gotten it in his childhood; that no one ever knows Nature anywhere unless he has known Nature somewhere in his youth; and that he who has thus known her in one place can, at any time, easily know her in any other. There may be new terms, phrases, groupings, and arrangements; but it is the same Mother-Speech learned at the knee.

Behind all that I have written lie the landscapes of a single neighbourhood. They are in "The Blue Grass Region of Kentucky," in "Flute and Violin"; still more in "A Summer in Arcady," in "A Kentucky Cardinal" and "Aftermath"; and in "The Reign of Law." The question is often asked, how can a man in a city write of a country far away that he has not seen for years? But that country is never far away, and the man looks over into it unceasingly. He has but to lift his eyes to see it—as clearly as he sees the people in the street.

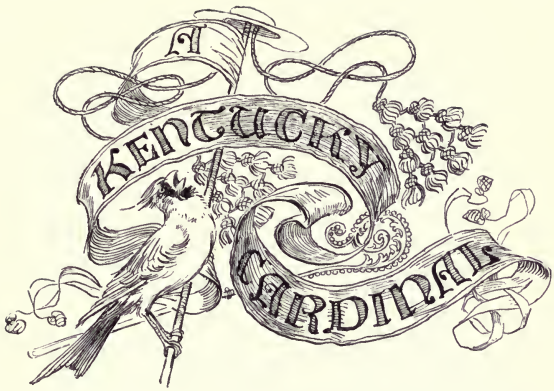
Such pictures of outdoor life are for any one a great possession, a divine indestructible wealth; and it is for the simple sake of trying to spread the love

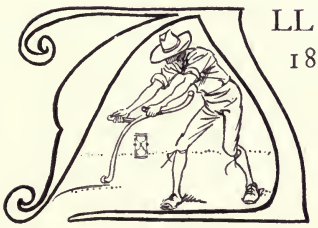
of Nature—of scattering broadcast such wealth—that he has written down these words with a certain childish figure so much in evidence: but this boy was the only one that he had the right to use as an illustration.

J. L. A.

New York City,
10*th October* 1900.

A KENTUCKY CARDINAL





LL this New Year's Day of 1850 the sun shone cloudless but wrought no thaw. Even the landscapes of frost on the window-panes did not melt a flower, and the little trees still keep their silvery boughs arched high above the jewelled avenues. During the afternoon a lean hare limped twice across the lawn, and there was not a creature stirring to chase it. Now the night is bitter cold, with no sounds outside but the cracking of the

porches as they freeze tighter. Even the north wind seems grown too numb to move. I had determined to convert its coarse, big noise into something sweet—as may often be done by a little art with the things of this life—and so stretched a horse-hair above the opening between the window sashes; but the soul of my harp has departed. I hear but the comfortable roar and snap of hickory logs, at long intervals a deeper breath from the dog stretched on his side at my feet, and the crickets under the hearth-stones. They have to thank me for that nook. One chill afternoon I came upon a whole company of them on the western slope of a woodland mound, so lethargic that I thumped them repeatedly before they could so much as get their senses. There was a branch near by, and the smell of mint in the air, so that had they been young Kentuckians one might have had a clue to the situation. With an ear for winter minstrelsy, I brought two home in a handkerchief, and assigned them an elegant suite of apartments under a loose brick.

But the finest music in the room is that which streams out to the ear of the spirit in many an exquisite strain from the hanging shelf of books on the opposite wall. Every volume there is an instrument which some melodist of the mind created and set vibrating with music, as a flower shakes out its perfume or a star shakes out its

Many an exquisite strain.

light. Only listen, and they soothe all care, as though the silken soft leaves of poppies had been made vocal and poured into the ear.

Towards dark, having seen to the comfort of a household of kind, faithful fellow-beings, whom man in his vanity calls the lower animals, I went last to walk under the cedars in the front yard, listening to that music which is at once so cheery and so sad—the low chirping of birds at dark winter twilights as they gather in from the frozen fields, from snow-buried shrubbery and hedge-rows, and settle down for the night in the depths of the evergreens, the only refuge from their enemies and shelter from the blast. But this evening they made no ado about their home-coming. To-day perhaps none had ventured forth. I am most uneasy when the red-bird is forced by hunger to leave the covert of his cedars, since he, on the naked or white landscapes of winter, offers the most far-shining and beautiful mark for Death. I stepped across to the tree in which a pair of these birds roost, and shook it, to make sure they were at home, and felt relieved when they fluttered into the next with the quick startled notes they utter when aroused.

The longer I live here, the better satisfied I am in having pitched my earthly camp-fire, gipsylike, on the edge of a town, keeping it on one side, and the green fields, lanes, and woods on the other.

Each, in turn, is to me as a magnate to the needle. At times the needle of my nature points towards the country. On that side everything is poetry. I wander over field and forest, and through me runs a glad current of feeling that is like a clear brook across the meadows of May. At others the needle veers round, and I go to town—to the massed haunts of the highest animal and cannibal. That way nearly everything is prose. I can feel the prose rising in me as I step along, like hair on the back of a dog, long before any other dogs are in sight. And, indeed, the case is much that of a country dog come to town, so that growls are in order at every corner. The only being in the universe at which I have ever snarled, or with which I have rolled over in the mud and fought like a common cur, is Man.

Among my neighbours who furnish me much of the plain prose of life, the nearest hitherto has been a bachelor named Jacob Mariner. I called him my raincrow, because the sound of his voice awoke apprehensions of falling weather. A visit from him was an endless drizzle. For Jacob came over to expound his minute symptoms; and had everything that he gave out on the subject of human ailments been written down, it must have made a volume as large, as solemn, and as inconvenient as a family Bible. My other nearest neighbour lives across the road—a widow, Mrs.

Apprehensions of falling weather.

Walters. I call Mrs. Walters my mocking-bird, because she reproduces by what is truly a divine arrangement of the throat the voices of the town.

Raincrow and mocking-bird.

When she flutters across to the yellow settee under the grape-vine and balances herself lightly with expectation, I have but to request that she favour me with a little singing, and as soon the air is vocal with every note of the village songsters. After

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this, Mrs. Walters usually begins to flutter in a motherly way around the subject of *my* symptoms.

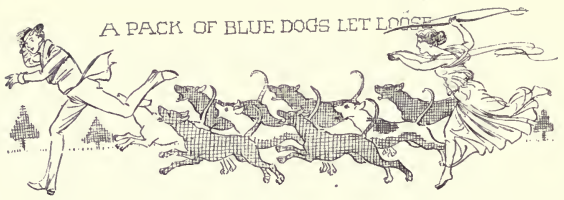
Naturally, it has been my wish to bring about between this raincrow and mocking-bird the desire to pair with one another. For, if a man always wanted to tell his symptoms, and a woman always wished to hear about them, surely a marriage compact on the basis of such a passion ought to open up for them a union of ever-flowing and indestructible felicity. They should associate as perfectly as the compensating metals of a pendulum, of which the one contracts as the other expands. And then I should be a little happier myself. But the perversity of life! Jacob would never confide in Mrs. Walters. Mrs. Walters would never inquire for Jacob.

Now poor Jacob is dead, of no complaint apparently, and with so few symptoms that even the doctors did not know what was the matter, and the upshot of this talk is that his place has been sold, and I am to have new neighbours. What a disturbance to a man living on the edge of a quiet town!

Tidings of the calamity came to-day from Mrs. Walters, who flew over and sang—sang even on a January afternoon—in a manner to rival her most vociferous vernal execution. But the poor creature was so truly distressed that I followed her to the front gate, and we twittered kindly at each other

We twittered kindly at each other.

over the fence, and ruffled our plumage with common disapproval. It is marvellous how a member of her sex will conceive dislike of people that she has never seen ; but birds are sensible of heat or cold long before either arrives, and it may be that this mocking-bird feels something wrong at the quill end of her feathers.



II

RS. WALTERS this morning with more news touching our incoming neighbours. Whenever I have faced towards this aggregation of unwelcome individuals, I have beheld it moving towards me as a thick gray mist, shutting out nature beyond. Perhaps they are approaching this part of the earth like a comet that carries its tail before it, and I am already enveloped in a disturbing, befogging nebulosity.

There is still no getting the truth, but it appears that they are a family of consequence in their way —which, of course, may be a very poor way. Mrs. Margaret Cobb, mother, lately bereaved of her husband, Joseph Cobb, who fell among the Kentucky boys at the battle of Buena Vista. A

Touches her guitar with maidenly solicitude.

son, Joseph Cobb, now cadet at West Point, with a desire to die like his father, but destined to die—who knows?—in a war that may break out in this country about the negroes. Then there is a daughter, Miss Georgiana Cobb, who embroiders blue-and-pink-worsted dogs on black foot-cushions, makes far-off crayon trees that look like sheep in the act of variously getting up and lying down on a hill-side, and, when the dew is falling and the moon is the shape of the human lips, touches her guitar with maidenly solicitude. Lastly, a younger daughter, who is in the half-fledged state of becoming educated.

While not reconciled, I am resigned. The young man when at home may wish to practise the deadly vocation of an American soldier of the period over the garden fence at my birds, in which case he and I could readily fight a duel, and help maintain an honoured custom of the commonwealth. The older daughter will sooner or later turn loose on my heels one of her pack of blue dogs. If this should befall me in the spring, and I survive the dog, I could retort with a dish of strawberries and a copy of *Lalla Rookh;* if in the fall, with a basket of grapes and Thomson's *Seasons*, after which there would be no further exchange of hostilities. The younger daughter, being a schoolgirl, will occasionally have to be subdued with green apples and salt. The mother could easily

give trouble; or she might be one of those few women to know whom is to know the best that there is in all this faulty world.

The middle of February. The depths of winter reached. Thoughtful, thoughtless words — the depths of winter. Everything gone inward and downward from surface and summit, Nature at low tide. In its time will come the height of summer, when the tides of life will rise to the tree-tops, or be dashed as silvery insect spray all but to the clouds. So bleak a season touches my concern for birds, which never seem quite at home in this world; and the winter has been most lean and hungry for them. Many snows have fallen — snows that are as raw cotton spread over their breakfast-table, and cutting off connection between them and its bounties. Next summer I must let the weeds grow up in my garden, so that they may have a better chance for seeds above the stingy level of the universal white. Of late I have opened a pawnbroker's shop for my hard-pressed brethren in feathers, lending at a fearful rate of interest; for every borrowing Lazarus will have to pay me back in due time by monthly instalments of singing. I shall have mine own again with usury. But were a man never so usurious, would he not lend a winter seed for a summer song? Would he refuse to invest his stale crumbs in an orchestra of divine instruments and a choir of heavenly voices? And

to-day, also, I ordered from a nursery-man more trees of holly, juniper, and fir, since the storm-beaten cedars will have to come down. For in Kentucky, when the forest is naked, and every shrub and hedge-row bare, what would become of our birds in the universal rigour and exposure of the world if there were no evergreens—Nature's hostelries for the homeless ones? Living in the depths of these, they can keep snow, ice, and wind at bay; prying eyes cannot watch them, nor enemies so well draw near; cones or seed or berries are their store; and in those untrodden chambers each can have the sacred company of his mate. But wintering here has terrible risks which few run. Scarcely in autumn have the leaves begun to drop from their high perches silently downward when the birds begin to drop away from the bare boughs silently southward. Lo! some morning the leaves are on the ground, and the birds have vanished. The species that remain, or that come to us then, wear the hues of the season, and melt into the tone of Nature's background—blues, grays, browns, with touches of white on tail and breast and wing for coming flecks of snow.

Save only him—proud, solitary stranger in our unfriendly land—the fiery grosbeak. Nature in Kentucky has no wintry harmonies for him. He could find these only among the tufts of the October sumac, or in the gum-tree when it stands

a pillar of red twilight fire in the dark November woods, or in the far depths of the crimson sunset skies, where, indeed, he seems to have been nested, and whence to have come as a messenger of beauty, bearing on his wings the light of his diviner home.

With almost everything earthly that he touches this high herald of the trees is in contrast. Among his kind he is without a peer. Even when the whole company of summer voyagers have sailed back to Kentucky, singing and laughing and kissing one another under the enormous green umbrella of Nature's leaves, he still is beyond them all in loveliness. But when they have been wafted away again to brighter skies and to soft islands over the sea, and he is left alone on the edge of that Northern world which he has dared invade and inhabit, it is then, amid black clouds and drifting snows, that the gorgeous cardinal stands forth in the ideal picture of his destiny. For it is then that his beauty is most conspicuous, and that Death, lover of the peerless, strikes at him from afar. So that he retires to the twilight solitude of his wild fortress. Let him even show his noble head and breast at a slit in its green window-shades, and a ray flashes from it to the eye of a cat; let him, as spring comes on, burst out in desperation and mount to the tree-tops which he loves, and his gleaming red coat betrays him to the poised hawk as to a distant sharpshooter; in the barn near by

A distant sharpshooter.

an owl is waiting to do his night marketing at various tender-meat stalls; and, above all, the eye and heart of man are his diurnal and nocturnal foe. What wonder if he is so shy, so rare, so secluded, this flame-coloured prisoner in dark-green chambers, who has only to be seen or heard and Death adjusts an arrow!

No vast Southern swamps or forest of pine here into which he may plunge. If he shuns man in Kentucky, he must haunt the long lonely river valleys where the wild cedars grow. If he comes into this immediate swarming pastoral region, where the people, with ancestral love of privacy, and not from any kindly thought of him, plant evergreens around their country homes, he must live under the very guns and amid the pitfalls of the enemy. Surely, could the first male of the species have foreseen how, through the generations of his race to come, both their beauty and their song, which were meant to announce them to Love, would also announce them to Death, he must have blanched snow-white with despair and turned as mute as stone. Is it this flight from the inescapable just behind that makes the singing of the red-bird thoughtful and plaintive, and, indeed, nearly all the wild sounds of Nature so like the outcry of the doomed? He will sit for a long time silent and motionless in the heart of a cedar, as if absorbed in the tragic memories of his race.

Then, softly, wearily, he will call out to you and to the whole world : *Peace . . Peace . . Peace . . Peace . . Peace !*—the most melodious sigh that ever issued from the clefts of a dungeon.

For colour and form, brilliant singing, his very enemies, and the bold nature he has never lost, I have long been most interested in this bird. Every year several pairs make their appearance about my place. This winter especially I have been feeding a pair ; and there should be finer music in the spring, and a lustier brood in summer.

III

ARCH has gone like its winds. The other night as I lay awake with that yearning which often beats within, there fell from the upper air the notes of the wild gander as he wedged his way onward by faith, not by sight, towards his distant bourn. I rose and, throwing open the shutters, strained eyes towards the unseen and unseeing explorer, startled, as a half-asleep soldier might be startled by the faint bugle-call of his commander, blown to him

from the clouds. What far-off lands, streaked with mortal dawn, does he believe in? In what soft sylvan waters will he bury his tired breast? Always when I hear his voice, often when not, I too desire to be up and gone out of these earthly marches where hunts the dark Fowler,—gone to some vast, pure, open sea, where, one by one, my scattered kind, those whom I love and those who love me, will arrive in safety, there to be together.

March is a month when the needle of my nature dips towards the country. I am away, greeting everything as it wakes out of winter sleep, stretches arms upward and legs downward, and drinks goblet after goblet of young sunshine. I must find the dark green snowdrop, and sometimes help to remove from her head, as she lifts it slowly from her couch, the frosted nightcap, which the old Nurse would still insist that she should wear. The pale green tips of daffodils are a thing of beauty. There is the sun-struck brook of the field, underneath the thin ice of which drops form and fall, form and fall, like big round silvery eyes that grow bigger and brighter with astonishment that you should laugh at them as they vanish. But most I love to see Nature do her spring house-cleaning in Kentucky, with the rain-clouds for her water-buckets and the winds for her brooms. What an amount of drenching and sweeping she can do in a day! How she dashes pailful and pailful into

every corner, till the whole earth is as clean as a new floor! Another day she attacks the piles of dead leaves, where they have lain since last October, and scatters them in a trice, so that every cranny may be sunned and aired. Or, grasping her long brooms by the handles, she will go into the woods and beat the icicles off the big trees as a housewife would brush down cobwebs; so that the released limbs straighten up like a man who has gotten out of debt, and almost say to you, joyfully, "Now, then, we are all right again!" This done, she begins to hang up soft new curtains at the forest windows, and to spread over her floor a new carpet of an emerald loveliness such as no mortal looms could ever have woven. And then, at last, she sends out invitations through the South, and even to some tropical lands, for the birds to come and spend the summer in Kentucky. The invitations are sent out in March, and accepted in April and May, and by June her house is full of visitors.

Not the eyes alone love Nature in March. Every other sense hies abroad. My tongue hunts for the last morsel of wet snow on the northern root of some aged oak. As one goes early to a concert-hall with a passion even for the preliminary tuning of the musicians, so my ear sits alone in the vast amphitheatre of Nature and waits for the earliest warble of the blue-bird, which seems to start up somewhere behind the heavenly curtains.

And the scent of spring, is it not the first lyric of the nose—that despised poet of the senses?

But this year I have hardly glanced at the small choice edition of Nature's spring verses. This by reason of the on-coming Cobbs, at the mere mention of whom I feel as though I were plunged up to my eyes in a vat of the prosaic. Some days ago workmen went into the house and all but scoured the very memory of Jacob off the face of the earth. Then there has been need to quiet Mrs. Walters.

Mrs. Walters does not get into our best society; so that the town is to her like a pond to a crane: she wades round it, going in as far as she can, and snatches up such small fry as come shoreward from the middle. In this way lately I have gotten hints of what is stirring in the vasty deeps of village opinion.

Mrs. Cobb is charged, among other dreadful things, with having ordered of the town manufacturer a carriage that is to be as fine as President Taylor's and with marching into church preceded by a servant, who bears her prayer-book on a velvet cushion. What if she rode in Cinderella's coach, or had her prayer-book carried before her on the back of a Green River turtle? But to her sex she promises to be an invidious Christian. I am rather disturbed by the gossip regarding the elder daughter. But this is so conflicting that

A false impression of Mrs. Cobb.

one impression is made only to be effaced by another.

A week ago their agent wanted to buy my place. I was so outraged that I got down my map of Kentucky to see where these peculiar beings originate. They come from a little town in the south-western corner of the State, on the Ohio River, named Henderson—named from that Richard Henderson who in the year 1775 bought about half of Kentucky from the Cherokees, and afterwards, as president of his purchase, addressed the first legislative assembly ever held in the West, seated under a big elm tree outside the walls of Boonsborough fort. These people must be his heirs, or they would never have tried to purchase my few Sabine acres. It is no surprise to discover that they are from the Green River country. They must bathe often in that stream. I suppose they wanted my front yard to sow it in penny-royal, the characteristic growth of those districts. They surely distil it and use it as a perfume on their handkerchiefs. It was perhaps from the founder of this family that Thomas Jefferson got authority for his statement that the Ohio is the most beautiful river in the world—unless, indeed, the President formed that notion of the Ohio upon lifting his eyes to it from the contemplation of Green River. Henderson! Green River region! To this town and to the blue-grass

country as Bœotia to Attica in the days of Pericles. Hereafter I shall call these people my Green River Bœotians.

A few days later their agent again, a little frigid, very urgent—this time to buy me out on my own terms, *any* terms. But what was back of all this, I inquired. I did not know these people, had never done them a favour. Why, then, such determination to have me removed? Why such bitterness, vindictiveness, ungovernable passion?

That was the point, he replied. This family had never wronged *me*. I had never even seen *them*. Yet they had heard of nothing but my intense dislike of them and opposition to their becoming my neighbours. They could not forgo their plans, but they were quite willing to give me the chance of leaving their vicinity, on whatever I might regard the most advantageous terms.

Oh, my mocking-bird, my mocking-bird! When you have been sitting on other front porches, have you, by the divine law of your being, been reproducing your notes as though they were mine, and even pouring forth the little twitter that was meant for your private ear?

As March goes out, two things more and more I hear—the cardinal has begun to mount to the bare tops of the locust-trees and scatter his notes downward, and over the way the workmen whistle

Got down my map of Kentucky.

and sing. The bird is too shy to sit in any tree on that side of the yard. But his eye and ear are studying them curiously. Sometimes I even fancy that he sings to them with a plaintive sort of joy, as though he were saying, 'Welcome—go away!'

IV

THE Cobbs will be the death of me before they get here. The report spread that they and I had already had a tremendous quarrel, and that, rather than live beside them, I had sold them my place. This set flowing towards me for days a stream of people, like a line of ants passing to and from the scene of a terrific false alarm. I had nothing to do but sit perfectly still and let each ant, as it ran up, touch me with its antennæ, get the counter-sign, and turn back to the village ant-hill. Not all, however. Some remained to hear me abuse the Cobbs; or, counting on my support, fell to abusing the Cobbs themselves. When I made not a word of reply, except to assure them that I really had not quarrelled with the Cobbs, had nothing

Certain ladies who bow sweetly to me.

against the Cobbs, and was immensely delighted that the Cobbs were coming, they went away amazingly cool and indignant. But for days I continued to hear such things attributed to me that, had that young West-Pointer been in the neighbourhood, and known how to shoot, he must infallibly have blown my head off me, as any Kentucky gentleman would.

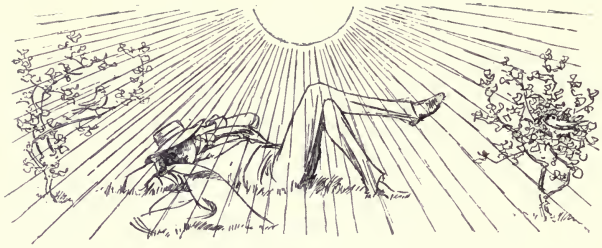
Others of my visitors, having heard that I was not to sell my place, were so glad of it that they walked around my garden and inquired about my health and the prospect for fruit. For the season has come when the highest animal begins to pay me some attention. During the winter, having little to contribute to the community, I drop from communal notice. But there are certain ladies who bow sweetly to me when my roses and honeysuckles burst into bloom ; a fat old cavalier of the South begins to shake hands with me when my asparagus bed begins to send up its tender stalks ; I am in high favour with two or three young ladies at the season of lilies and sweet-pea ; there is one old soul who especially loves rhubarb pies, which she makes to look like little latticed porches in front of little green skies, and it is she who remembers me and my row of pie-plant ; and still another, who knows better than cat-birds when currants are ripe. Above all, there is a preacher, who thinks my sins are as scarlet so long as my

strawberries are, and plants himself in my bed at that time to reason with me of Judgment to come; and a doctor, who gets despondent about my constitution in pear-time—after which my health seems to return, but never my pears.

So that, on the whole, from May till October I am the bright side of the moon, and the telescopes of the town are busy observing my phenomena; after which it is as though I had rolled over on my dark side, there to lie forgotten till once more the sun entered the proper side of the zodiac. But let me except always the few steadily luminous spirits I know, with whom is no variableness, neither shadow of turning. If any one wishes to become famous in a community, let him buy a small farm on the edge of it and cultivate fruits, berries, and flowers, which he freely gives away or lets be freely taken.

All this has taken freely of my swift April days. Besides, I have made me a new side-porch, made it myself, for I like to hammer and drive things home, and because the rose on the old one had rotted it from post to shingle. And then, when I had tacked the rose in place again, the little old window opening above it made that side of my house look like a boy in his Saturday hat and Sunday breeches. So in went a large new window; and now these changes have mysteriously offended Mrs. Walters, who says the town is laughing at

me for trying to outdo the Cobbs. The highest animal is the only one who is divinely gifted with such noble discernment. But I am not sorry to have my place look its best. When they see it, they will perhaps understand why I was not to be driven out by a golden cracker on their family whip. They could not have bought my little woodland pasture, where for a generation has been picnic and muster and Fourth-of-July ground, and where the brave fellows met to volunteer for the Mexican war. They could not have bought even the heap of brush behind my wood-pile, where the brown thrashers build.



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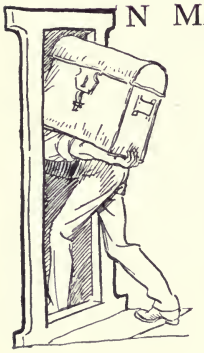


IN MAY I am of the earth, earthy. The soul loses its wild white pinions; the heart puts forth its short, powerful wings, heavy with heat and colour, that flutter, but do not lift it off the ground. The month comes and goes, and not once do I think of raising my eyes to the stars. The very sunbeams fall on the body as a warm golden net, and keep thought and feeling from escape. Nature uses beauty now not to uplift, but to entice. I find her intent upon the one general business of seeing that no type of her creatures gets left out of the generations. Studied in my yard full of birds, as with a condensing glass of the world, she can

be seen enacting among them the dramas of history. Yesterday, in the secret recess of a walnut, I saw the beginning of the Trojan war. Last week I witnessed the battle of Actium fought out in mid-air. And down among my hedges—indeed, openly in my very barn-yard—there is a perfectly scandalous Salt Lake City.

And while I am watching the birds, they are watching me. Not a little fop among them, having proposed and been accepted, but perches on a limb, and has the air of putting his hands mannishly under his coat-tails and crying out at me, 'Hello! Adam, what were you made for?' 'You attend to your business, and I'll attend to mine,' I answer. 'You have one May; I have twenty-five!' He didn't wait to hear. He caught sight of a pair of clear brown eyes peeping at him out of a near tuft of leaves, and sprang thither with open arms and the sound of a kiss.

But if I have twenty-five Mays remaining, are not some Mays gone? Ah, well! Better a single May with the right mate, than the full number with the wrong. And where is she—the right one? If she ever comes near my yard and answers my whistle, I'll know it; and then I'll teach these popinjays in blue coats and white pantaloons what Adam was made for.

But the wrong one—there's the terror! Only think of so composite a phenomenon as Mrs.

Walters, for instance, adorned with limp nightcap and stiff curl-papers, like garnishes around a leg of roast mutton, waking up beside me at four o'clock in the morning as some gray-headed love-bird of Madagascar, and beginning to chirp and trill in an ecstasy!

The new neighbours have come — mother, younger daughter, and servants. The son is at West Point; and the other daughter lingers a few days, unable, no doubt, to tear herself away from her beloved pennyroyal and dearest Green River. They are quiet; have borrowed nothing from any one in the neighbourhood; have well-dressed, well-trained servants; and one begins to be a little impressed. The curtains they have put up at the windows suggest that the whole nest is being lined with soft, cool, spotless loveliness, which is very restful and beguiling.

No one has called yet, since they are not at home till June; but Mrs. Walters has done some tall wading lately, and declares that people do not know what to think. They will know when the elder daughter arrives; for it is the worst member of the family that settles what the world shall think of the others.

If only she were not the worst! If only as I sat here beside my large new window, around which the old rose-bush has been trained and now is blooming, I could look across to her window

The new neighbours have come.

where the white curtains hang, and feel that behind them sat, shy and gentle, the wood-pigeon for whom through Mays gone by I have been vaguely waiting!

And yet I do not believe that I could live a single year with only the sound of cooing in the house. A wood-pigeon would be the death of me.

VI

THIS morning, the 3rd of June, the Undine from Green River rose above the waves.

The strawberry bed is almost under their windows. I had gone out to pick the first dish of the season for breakfast; for while I do not care to eat except to live, I never miss an opportunity of living upon strawberries.

I was stooping down and bending the wet leaves over, so as not to miss any, when a voice at the window above said, timidly and playfully:

'Are you the gardener?'

I picked on, turning as red as the berries. Then the voice said again :

'Old man, are you the gardener?'

'Old man, are you the gardener?'

Of course a person looking down carelessly on the stooping figure of *any* man, and seeing nothing but a faded straw hat, and arms and feet and

ankles bent together, might easily think him decrepit with age. Some things touch off my temper. But I answered, humbly:

'I am the gardener, madam.'

'How much do you ask for your strawberries?'

'The gentleman who owns this place does not sell his strawberries. He gives them away, if he likes people. How much do you ask for *your* strawberries?'

'What a nice old gentleman! Is he having those picked to give away?'

'He is having these picked for his breakfast.'

'Don't you think he'd like you to give me those, and pick him some more?'

'I fear not, madam.'

'Nevertheless, you might. He'd never know.'

'I think he'd find it out.'

'You are not afraid of him, are you?'

'I am when he gets mad.'

'Does he treat you badly?'

'If he does, I always forgive him.'

'He doesn't seem to provide you with very many clothes.'

I picked on.

'But you seem nicely fed.'

I picked on.

'What is his name, old man? Don't you like to talk?'

'Adam Moss.'

'Such a green, cool, soft name! It is like his house and yard and garden. What does he do?'

'Whatever he pleases.'

'You must not be impertinent to me, or I'll tell him. What does he like?'

'Birds—red-birds. What do *you* like?'

'Red-birds! How does he catch them? Throw salt on their tails?'

'He is a lover of Nature, madam, and particularly of birds.'

'What does *he* know about birds? Doesn't he care for people?'

'He doesn't think many worth caring for.'

'Indeed! And *he* is perfect, then, is he?'

'He thinks he is nearly as bad as any; but that doesn't make the rest any better.'

'Poor old gentleman! He must have the blues dreadfully. What does he do with his birds? Eat his robins, and stuff his cats, and sell his red-birds in cages?'

'He considers it part of his mission in life to keep them from being eaten or stuffed or caged.'

'And you say he is nearly a hundred?'

'He is something over thirty years of age, madam.'

'Thirty? Surely we heard he was very old. And does he live in that beautiful little old house all by himself?'

'*I* live with him!'

'*You!* Ha! ha! ha! And what is *your* name, you dear good old man?'

'Adam.'

'*Two* Adams living in the same house! Are you the *old* Adam? I have heard so much of him.'

At this I rose, pushed back my hat, and looked up at her.

'*I* am Adam Moss,' I said, with distant politeness. 'You can have these strawberries for your breakfast if you want them.'

There was a low quick 'Oh!' and she was gone, and the curtains closed over her face. It was rude; but neither ought she to have called me the old Adam. I have been thinking of one thing: why should she speak slightingly of my knowledge of birds? What does she know about them? I should like to inquire.

Late this afternoon, I dressed up in my high gray wool hat, my fine long-tailed blue cloth coat with brass buttons, my pink waistcoat, frilled shirt, white cravat, and yellow nankeen trousers, and walked slowly several times around my strawberry bed. Did not see any more ripe strawberries.

Within the last ten days I have called twice upon the Cobbs, urged no doubt by an extravagant readiness to find them all that I feared they were not. How exquisite in life is the art of not seeing many things, and of forgetting many that have

I dressed up.

been seen! They received me as though nothing unpleasant had happened. Nor did the elder daughter betray that we had met. She has not forgotten, for more than once I surprised a light in her eyes as though she were laughing. She has not, it is certain, told even her mother and sister. Somehow this fact invests her character with a charm as of subterranean roominess and secrecy. Women who tell everything are like finger-bowls of clear water.

But it is Sylvia that pleases me. She must be about seventeen; and so demure and confiding that I was ready to take her by the hand, lead her to the garden-gate, and say: Dear child, everything in here—butterflies, flowers, fruit, honey, everything—is yours; come and go and gather as you like.

Yesterday morning I sent them a large dish of strawberries, with a note asking whether they would walk during the day over to my woodland pasture, where the soldiers had a barbecue before setting out for the Mexican war. The mother and Sylvia accepted. Our walk was a little overshadowed by their loss; and as I thoughtlessly described the gaiety of that scene—the splendid young fellows dancing in their bright uniforms, and now and then pausing to wipe their foreheads, the speeches, the cheering, the dinner under the trees, and, a few days later, the tear-dimmed eyes,

the hand-wringing and embracing, and at last the marching proudly away, each with a Bible in his pocket, and many never, never to return—I was sorry that I had not foreseen the sacred chord I was touching. But it made good friends of us more quickly, and they were well-bred, so that we returned to all appearance in gay spirits. The elder daughter came to meet us, and went at once silently to her mother's side, as though she had felt the separation. I wondered whether she had declined to go because of the memory of her father. As we passed my front gate, I asked them to look at my flowers. The mother praised also the cabbages, thus showing an admirably balanced mind; the little Sylvia fell in love with a vine-covered arbour; the elder daughter appeared to be secretly watching the many birds about the grounds, but when I pointed out several less known species, she lost interest.

What surprises most is that they are so refined and intelligent. It is greatly to be feared that we Kentuckians in this part of the State are profoundly ignorant as to the people in other parts. I told Mrs. Walters this, and she, seeing that I am beginning to like them, is beginning to like them herself. Dear Mrs. Walters! Her few ideas are like three or four marbles on a level floor: they have no power to move themselves, but roll equally well in any direction you push them.

Over to my woodland pasture.

This afternoon I turned a lot of little town boys into my strawberry bed, and now it looks like a field that had been harrowed and rolled. I think they would gladly have pulled up some of

Little town boys into my strawberry bed.

the plants to see whether there might not be berries growing on the roots.

It is unwise to do everything that you can for people at once; for when you can do nothing more, they will say you are no longer like yourself, and turn against you. So I have meant to go slowly with the Cobbs in my wish to be neigh-

bourly, and do not think that they could reasonably be spoiled on one dish of strawberries in three weeks. But the other evening Mrs. Cobb sent over a plate of golden sally-lunn on a silver waiter, covered with a snow-white napkin; and acting on this provocation, I thought they could be trusted with a basket of cherries.

So next morning, in order to save the ripening fruit on a rather small tree of choice variety, I thought I should put up a scarecrow, and to this end rummaged a closet for some last winter's old clothes. These I crammed with straw, and I fastened the resulting figure in the crotch of the tree, tying the arms to the adjoining limbs, and giving it the dreadful appearance of shouting, 'Keep out of here, you rascals, or you'll get hurt!' And, in truth, it did look so like me that I felt a little uncanny about it myself.

Returning home late, I went at once to the tree, where I found not a quart of cherries, and the servants told of an astonishing thing: that no sooner had the birds discovered who was standing in the tree, wearing the clothes in which he used to feed them during the winter, than the news spread like wildfire to the effect that he had climbed up there and was calling out, 'Here is the best tree, fellows! Pitch in and help yourselves!' So that the like of the chattering and fetching away was never seen before. This was

the story; but little negroes love cherries, and it is not incredible that the American birds were assisted in this instance by a large family of fat young African spoon-bills.

Anxious to save another tree, and afraid to use more of my own clothes, I went over to Mrs. Walters, and got from her an old bonnet and veil, a dress and cape, and a pair of her cast-off yellow gaiters. These garments I strung together and prepared to look lifelike as nearly as a stuffing of hay would meet the inner requirements of the case. I then seated the dread apparition in the fork of a limb, and awaited results. The first thief was an old jay, who flew towards the tree with his head turned to one side to see whether any one was overtaking him. But scarcely had he alighted when he uttered a scream of horror that was sickening to hear, and dropped on the grass beneath, after which he took himself off with a silence and speed that would have done credit to a passenger-pigeon. That tree was rather avoided for some days, or it may have been let alone merely because others were ripening; so that Mrs. Cobb got her cherries, and I sent Mrs. Walters some also for the excellent loan of her veil and gaiters.

As the days pass I fall in love with Sylvia, who has been persuaded to turn my arbour into a

reading-room, and is often to be found there of mornings with one of Sir Walter's novels. Sometimes I leave her alone, sometimes lie on the bench facing her, while she reads aloud, or, tiring, prattles. Little half-fledged spirit, to whom the yard is the earth and June eternity, but who peeps over the edge of the nest at the chivalry of the ages, and fancies that she knows the world. The other day, as we were talking, she tapped the edge of her *Ivanhoe* with a slate-pencil—for she is also studying the Greatest Common Divisor—and said, warningly, 'You must not make epigrams; for if you succeeded you would be brilliant, and everything brilliant is tiresome.'

'Who is your authority for *that* epigram, Miss Sylvia?' I said, laughing.

'Don't you suppose that I have any ideas but what I get from books?'

'You may have all wisdom, but those sayings proceed only from experience.'

'I have my intuitions; they are better than experience.'

'If you keep on, you will be making epigrams presently, and then I shall find you tiresome, and go away.'

'You couldn't. I am your guest. How unconventional I am to come over and sit in your arbour? But it is Georgiana's fault.'

'Did *she* tell you to come?'

'No; but she didn't keep me from coming. Whenever any one of us does anything improper we always say to each other, "It's Georgiana's fault. She ought not to have taught us to be so simple and unconventional."'

'And is she the family governess?'

'She governs the family. There doesn't seem to be any real government, but we all do as she says. You might think at first that Georgiana was the most light-headed member of the family, but she isn't. She's deep. I'm shallow in comparison with her. She calls me sophisticated, and introduces me as the elder Miss Cobb, and says that if I don't stop reading Scott's novels and learn more arithmetic she will put white caps on me, and make me walk to church in carpet slippers and with grandmother's stick.'

'But you don't seem to have stopped, Miss Sylvia.'

'No; but I'm stopping. Georgiana always gives us time, but we get right at last. It was two years before she could make my brother go to West Point. He was wild and rough, and wanted to raise tobacco, and float with it down to New Orleans, and have a good time. Then when she had gotten him to go she was afraid he'd come back, and so she persuaded my mother to live here, where there isn't any tobacco, and where I could be sent to school. That took her a year, and now

she is breaking up my habit of reading nothing but novels. She gets us all down in the end. One day when she and Joe were little children they were out at the wood-pile, and Georgiana was sitting on a log eating a jam biscuit, with her feet on the log in front of her. Joe had a hand-axe, and was chopping at anything till he caught sight of her feet. Then he went to the end of the log, and whistled like a steamboat, and began to hack down in that direction, calling out to her: "Take your toes out of the way, Georgiana. I am coming down the river. The current is up and I can't stop." "My toes were there first," said Georgiana, and went on eating her biscuit. "Take them out of the way, I tell you," he shouted as he came nearer, "or they'll get cut off." "They were there first," repeated Georgiana, and took another delicious nibble. Joe cut straight along, and went *whack!* right into her five toes. Georgiana screamed with all her might, but she held her foot on the log, till Joe dropped the hatchet with horror, and caught her in his arms. "Georgiana, I *told* you to take your toes away," he cried; "you are such a little fool," and ran with her into the house. But she always had control over him after that.'

To-day I saw Sylvia enter the arbour, and shortly afterwards I followed with a book.

'When you stop reading novels and begin to

read history, Miss Sylvia, here is the most remarkable history of Kentucky that was ever written or ever will be. It is by my father's old teacher of natural history in Transylvania University, Professor Rafinesque, who also had a wonderful botanical garden on this side of the town ; perhaps the first ever seen in this country.'

'I know all about it,' replied Sylvia, resenting this slight upon her erudition. 'Georgiana has my father's copy, and his was presented to him by Mr. Audubon.'

'Audubon!' I said, with a doubt.

'Never heard of Audubon?' cried Sylvia, delighted to show up my ignorance.

'Only of the great Audubon, Miss Sylvia ; the *great*, the very *great* Audubon.'

'Well, this was the *great*, the very *great* Audubon. He lived in Henderson, and kept a corn-mill. He and my father were friends, and he gave my father some of his early drawings of Kentucky birds. Georgiana has them now, and that is where she gets her love of birds—from my father, who got his from the *great*, the very *great* Audubon.'

'Would Miss Cobb let me see these drawings?' I asked eagerly.

'She might ; but she prizes them as much as if they were stray leaves out of the only Bible in the world.'

As Sylvia turned inside out this pocket of her mind, there had dropped out a key to her sister's conduct. Now I understood her slighting attitude towards my knowledge of birds. But I shall feel some interest in Miss Cobb from this time on. I never dreamed that she could bring me fresh news of that rare spirit whom I have so wished to see, and for one week in the woods with whom I would give any year of my life. Are they possibly the Henderson family to whom Audubon entrusted the box of his original drawings during his absence in Philadelphia, and who let a pair of Norway rats rear a family in it, and cut to pieces nearly a thousand inhabitants of the air?

There are two more days of June. Since the talk with Sylvia I have called twice more upon the elder Miss Cobb. Upon reflection, it is misleading to refer to this young lady in terms so dry, stiff, and denuded; and I shall drop into Sylvia's form, and call her simply Georgiana. That looks better —Georgiana! It sounds well, too—Georgiana!

Georgiana, then, is a rather elusive character. The more I see of her the less I understand her. If your nature draws near hers, it retreats. If you pursue, it flies—a little frightened perhaps. If then you keep still and look perfectly safe, she will return, but remain at a fixed distance, like a bird that will stay in your yard, but not enter your

house. It is hardly shyness, for she is not shy, but more like some strain of wild nature in her that refuses to be domesticated. One's faith is strained to accept Sylvia's estimate that Georgiana is deep—she is so light, so airy, so playful. Sylvia is a demure little dove that has pulled over itself an owl's skin, and is much prouder of its wicked old feathers than of its innocent heart; but Georgiana —what is she? Secretly an owl with the buoyancy of a humming-bird? However, it's nothing to me. She hovers around her mother and Sylvia with a fondness that is rather beautiful. I did not mention the subject of Audubon and her father, for it is never well to let an elder sister know that a younger one has been talking about her. I merely gave her several chances to speak of birds, but she ignored them. As for me and my love of birds, such trifles are beneath her notice I don't like her, and it will not be worth while to call again soon, though it would be pleasant to see those drawings.

This morning as I was accidentally passing under her window I saw her at it and lifted my hat. She leaned over with her cheek in her palm, and said, smiling:

'You mustn't spoil Sylvia!'

'What is my definite offence in that regard?'

'Too much arbour, too many flowers, too much fine treatment.'

'Does fine treatment ever harm anybody? Is it not bad treatment that spoils people?'

'Good treatment may never spoil people who are old enough to know its rarity and value. But you say you are a student of nature; have you not observed that nature never lets the sugar get to things until they are ripe? Children must be kept tart.'

'The next time that Miss Sylvia comes over, then, I am to give her a tremendous scolding and a big basket of green apples.'

'Or, what is worse, suppose you encourage her to study the Greatest Common Divisor? I am trying to get her ready for school in the fall.'

'Is she being educated for a teacher?'

'You know that Southern ladies never teach.'

'Then she will never need the Greatest Common Divisor. I have known many thousands of human beings, and none but teachers ever has the least use for the Greatest Common Divisor.'

'But she needs to do things that she dislikes. We all do.'

I smiled at the memory of a self-willed little bare foot on a log years ago.

'I shall see that my grape arbour does not further interfere with Miss Sylvia's progress towards perfection.'

'Why didn't you wish us to be your neighbours?'

'I didn't know that you were the right sort of people.'

'Are we the right sort?'

'The value of my land has almost been doubled.'

'It is a pleasure to know that you approve of us on those grounds. Will the value of our land rise also, do you think? And why do you suppose we objected to you as a neighbour?'

'I cannot imagine.'

'The imagination can be cultivated, you know. Then tell me this: why do Kentuckians in this part of Kentucky think so much of themselves compared with the rest of the world?'

'Perhaps it's because they are Virginians. There may be various reasons.'

'Do the people ever tell what the reasons are?'

'I have never heard one.'

'And if we stayed here long enough, and imitated them closely, do you suppose we would get to feel the same way?'

'I am sure of it.'

'It must be so pleasant to consider Kentucky the best part of the world, and your part of Kentucky the best of the State, and your family the best of all the best families in that best part, and yourself the best member of your family. Ought not that to make one perfectly happy?'

'I have often observed that it seems to do so.'

'It is delightful to remember that you approve

of us. And we should feel so glad to be able to return the compliment. Good-bye!'

Any one would have to admit, however, that there is no sharpness in Georgiana's pleasantry. The child-nature in her is so sunny, sportive, so bent on harmless mischief. She still plays with life as a kitten with a ball of yarn. Some day Kitty will fall asleep with the Ball poised in the cup of one foot. Then, waking, when her dream is over, she will find that her plaything has become a rocky, thorny, storm-swept, immeasurable world, and that she, a woman, stands holding out towards it her imploring arms, and asking only for some littlest part in its infinite destinies.

After the last talk with Georgiana I felt renewed desire to see those Audubon drawings. So yesterday morning I sent over to her some things written by a Northern man, whom I call the young Audubon of the Maine woods. His name is Henry D. Thoreau, and it is, I believe, known only to me down here. Everything that I can find of his is as pure and cold and lonely as a wild cedar of the mountain rocks, standing far above its smokeless valley and hushed white river. She returned them to-day, with word that she would thank me in person, and to-night I went over in a state of rather senseless eagerness.

Her mother and sister had gone out, and she sat on the dark porch alone. The things of Thoreau's have interested her, and she asked me to tell her all I knew of him, which was little enough. Then of her own accord she began to speak of her father and Audubon—of the one with the worship of love, of the other with the worship of greatness. I felt as though I were in a moonlit cathedral; for her voice, the whole revelation of her nature, made the spot so impressive and so sacred. She scarcely addressed me; she was communing with them. Nothing that her father told her regarding Audubon appears to have been forgotten; and, brought nearer than ever before to that lofty, tireless spirit in its wanderings through the Kentucky forests, I almost forgot her to whom I was listening. But in the midst of it she stopped, and it was again kitten and yarn. I left quite as abruptly. Upon my soul I believe that Georgiana doesn't think me worth talking to seriously.

VII

JULY has dragged like a log across a wet field.

There was the Fourth, which is always the grandest occasion of the year with us. Society has taken up Sylvia and rejected Georgiana; and so with its great gallantry, and to her boundless delight, Sylvia was invited to sit with a bevy of girls in a large furniture waggon covered with flags and bunting. The girls were to be dressed in white, carry flowers and flags, and sing 'The Star-Spangled Banner' in the procession, just before the fire-engine.

I wrote a note to Georgiana, asking whether it would interfere with Sylvia's Greatest Common Divisor if I presented her with a profusion of elegant flowers on that occasion. Georgiana herself had equipped Sylvia with a truly exquisite silken flag on a silver staff; and as Sylvia both sang and waved with all her might, not only to keep up the Green River reputation in such matters, but with a mediæval determination to attract a young man on the fire-engine behind, she quite eclipsed every other miss in the waggon, and was not even hoarse when persuaded at last to stop. So that several of the representatives of the other States voted afterwards in a special congress that she was loud, and in no way as nice as they had fancied, and that they ought never to recognise her again except in church and at funerals.

And then the month brought down from West Point the son of the family, who cut *off*—or cut *at*—Georgiana's toes, I remember. With him a sort of cousin, who lives in New York State; and after a few days of toploftical strutting around town, and a pusillanimous crack or two over the back-garden fence at my birds, they went away again, to the home of this New York cousin, carrying Georgiana with them to spend the summer.

Nothing has happened since. Only Sylvia and I have been making hay while the sun shines—or does not shine, if one chooses to regard Georgiana's

absence in that cloudy fashion. Sylvia's ordinary armour consists of a slate-pencil for a spear, a slate for a shield, and a volume of Sir Walter for

Topleftical strutting.

a bludgeon. Now and then I have found her sitting alone in the arbour with the drooping air of Lucy Ashton beside the fountain; and she

would be better pleased if I met her clandestinely there in cloak and plume with the deadly complexion of Ravenswood.

The other day I caught her toiling at something, and she admitted being at work on a poem which would be about half as long as the "Lay of the Last Minstrel." She read me the opening lines, after that bland habit of young writers; and as nearly as I recollect, they began as follows:

> I love to see gardens and arbours and plants;
> I love the fine air, but not my fine aunts.

When not under the spell of mediæval chivalry she prattles needlessly of Georgiana, early life, and their old home in Henderson. Although I have pointed out to her the gross impropriety of her conduct, she has persisted in reading me some of Georgiana's letters written from the home of that New York cousin, whose mother they are now visiting. I didn't like *him* particularly. Sylvia relates that he was a favourite of her father's.

The dull month passes to-day. One thing I have secretly wished to learn: did her brother cut Georgiana's toes entirely off?

VIII

IN AUGUST the pale and delicate poetry of the Kentucky land makes itself felt as silence and repose. Still skies, still woods, still sheets of forest water, still flocks and herds, long lanes winding without the sound of a traveller through fields of the universal brooding stillness. The sun no longer blazing, but muffled in a veil of palest blue No more black clouds rumbling and rushing up from the horizon, but a single white one brushing slowly against the zenith like the lost

wing of a swan. Far beneath it the silver-breasted hawk, using the cloud as his lordly parasol. The eagerness of spring gone, now all but incredible as having ever existed; the birds hushed and hiding; the bee, so nimble once, fallen asleep over his own cider-press in the shadow of the golden apple. From the depths of the woods may come the notes of the cuckoo; but they strike the air more and more slowly, like the *clack, clack, clack* of a distant wheel that is being stopped at the close of harvest. The whirring wings of the locust let themselves go in one long wave of sound, passing into silence. All nature is a vast sacred goblet, filling drop by drop to the brim, and not to be shaken. But the stalks of the later flowers begin to be stuffed with hurrying bloom lest they be too late; and the nighthawk rapidly mounts his stairway of flight higher and higher, higher and higher, as though he would rise above the warm white sea of atmosphere and breathe in cold ether.

Always in August my nature will go its own way and seek its own peace. I roam solitary, but never alone, over this rich pastoral land, crossing farm after farm, and keeping as best I can out of sight of the labouring or loitering negroes. For the sight of them ruins every landscape, and I shall never feel myself free till they are gone. What if they sing? The more is the pity that any human being could be happy enough to sing so long as

he was a slave in any thought or fibre of his nature.

Sometimes it is through the aftermath of fat wheat-fields, where float like myriad little nets of silver gauze the webs of the crafty weavers, and where a whole world of winged small folk flit from tree-top to tree-top of the low weeds. They are all mine—these Kentucky wheat-fields. After the owner has taken from them his last sheaf I come in and gather my harvest also—one that he did not see, and doubtless would not begrudge me—the harvest of beauty. Or I walk beside tufted aromatic hemp-fields, as along the shores of softly foaming emerald seas ; or past the rank and file of fields of Indian-corn, which stand like armies that had gotten ready to march, but been kept waiting for further orders, until at last the soldiers had grown tired, as the gayest will, of their yellow plumes and green ribbons, and let their big hands fall heavily down at their sides. There the white and the purple morning-glories hang their long festoons and open to the soft midnight winds their elfin trumpets.

This year as never before I have felt the beauty of the world. And with the new brightness in which every common scene has been apparelled there has stirred within me a need of human companionship unknown in the past. It is as if Nature had spread out her last loveliness and said,

'See! You have before you now all that you can ever get from me! It is not enough. Realise

I see people on account of my grapes and pears.

this in time. I am your Mother. Love me as a child. But remember! such love can be only a little part of your life.'

Therefore I have spent the month restless, on the eve of change, drawn to Nature, driven from her. In September it will be different, for then there are more things to do on my small farm, and I see people on account of my grapes and pears. My malady this August has been an idle mind—so idle that a letter from Georgiana seems its main event. This was written from the old home of Audubon on the Hudson, whither they had gone sight-seeing. It must have been to her much like a pilgrimage to a shrine. She wrote informally, telling me about the place and enclosing a sprig of cedar from one of the trees in the yard. Her mind was evidently overflowing on the subject. It was rather pleasant to have the overflow turned my way. I shall plant the cedar where it will stay always green.

I saw Georgiana once more before her leaving. The sudden appearance of her brother and cousin, and the news that she would return with them for the summer, spurred me up to make another attempt at those Audubon drawings.

How easy it was to get them! It is what a man thinks a woman will be willing to do that she seldom does. But she made a confession. When she first found that I was a smallish student of birds, she feared I would not like Audubon, since men so often sneer at those who do in a grand way what they can do only in a poor one. I had

another revelation of Georgiana's more serious nature, which is always aroused by the memory of her father. There is something beautiful and steadfast in this girl's soul. In our hemisphere vines climb round from left to right ; if Georgiana loved you she would, if bidden, reverse every law of her nature for you as completely as a vine that you had caused to twine from right to left.

Sylvia enters school the 1st of September, and Georgiana is to be at home then to see to that. How surely she drives this family before her—and with as gentle a touch as that of a slow south wind upon the clouds.

Those poor first drawings of Audubon ! He succeeded ; we study his early failings. The world never studies the failures of those who do not succeed in the end.

The birds are moulting. If man could only moult also—his mind once a year its errors, his heart once a year its useless passions ! How fine we should all look if every August the old plumage of our natures would drop out and be blown away, and fresh quills take the vacant places ! But we have one set of feathers to last us through our three-score years and ten—one set of spotless feathers, which we are told to keep spotless through all our lives in a dirty world. If one gets broken, broken it stays ; if one gets blackened, nothing will cleanse it. No doubt we shall all fly home at

last, like a flock of pigeons that were once turned loose snow-white from the sky, and made to descend and fight one another and fight everything else for a poor living amid soot and mire. If then the hand of the unseen Fancier is stretched forth to draw us in, how can he possibly smite any one of us, or cast us away, because we come back to him black and blue with bruises, and besmudged and bedraggled past recognition!

IX

TO-DAY, the 7th of September, I made a discovery. The pair of red-birds that built in my cedar-trees last winter got duly away with the brood. Several times during summer rambles I cast my eye about, but they were not to be seen Early this afternoon I struck out across the country towards a sink-hole in a field two miles away, some fifty yards in diameter, very deep, and enclosed by a fence. A series of these circular basins, at regular intervals apart, runs across the country over there, suggesting the remains of ancient earthworks. The bottom had dropped out of this one, probably

communicating with the many caves that are characteristic of this blue limestone.

Within the fence everything is an impenetrable thicket of weeds and vines—blackberry, thistle, ironweed, pokeweed, elder, golden-rod. As I drew near, I saw two or three birds dive down, with the shy way they have at this season ; and when I came to the edge, everything was quiet. But I threw a stone at a point where the tangle was deep, and there was a great fluttering and scattering of the pretenders. And then occurred more than I had looked for. The stone had hardly struck the brush when what looked like a tongue of vermilion flame leaped forth near by, and, darting across, struck itself out of sight in the green vines on the opposite slope. A male and a female cardinal flew up also, balancing themselves on sprays of the blackberry, and uttering excitedly their quick call-notes. I whistled to the male as I had been used, and he recognised me by shooting up his crest, and hopping to nearer twigs with louder inquiry. All at once, as if an idea had urged him, he sprang across to the spot where the first frightened male had disappeared. I could still hear him under the vines, and presently he reappeared and flew up into a locust-tree on the farther edge of the basin, followed by the other. What had taken place or took place then I do not know ; but I wished he might be saying : " My

Welcomed her gaily.

son, that man over there is the one who was very good to your mother and me last winter, and who owns the tree you were born in. I have warned you, of course, never to trust Man ; but I would advise you, when you have found your sweetheart, to give him a trial, and take her to his cedar-trees.'

If he said anything like this, it certainly had a terrible effect on the son ; for, having mounted rapidly on the tree-top, he clove the blue with his scarlet wings as though he were flying from death. I lost sight of him over a corn-field.

One fact pleased me : the father returned to his partner under the briers, for he is not of the lower sort who forget the mother when the children are reared. They hold faithfully together during the ever more silent, ever more shadowy autumn days ; his warming breast is close to hers through frozen winter nights ; and if they both live to see another May she is still all the world to him, and woe to any brilliant vagabond who should warble a wanton love-song under her holy windows.

Georgiana returned the last of August. The next morning she was at her window, looking across into my yard. I was obliged to pass that way, and welcomed her gaily, expressing my thanks for the letter.

'I had to come back, you see,' she said, with calm simplicity. I lingered awkwardly, stripping upward the stalks of some weeds.

'Very few Kentucky birds are migratory,' I replied at length, with desperate brilliancy and an overwhelming grimace.

'I shall go back some time—to stay,' she said, and turned away with a parting faintest smile.

Is that West Point brother giving trouble? If so, the sooner a war breaks out and he gets killed, the better. One thing is certain: if, for the next month, fruit and flowers will give Georgiana any pleasure, she shall have a good deal of pleasure. She is so changed! But why need I take on about it?

They have been cleaning out a drain under the streets along the Town Fork of Elkhorn, and several people are down with fever.

. . . . . .

Knocked reproachfully.

X

EW-YEAR'S night again, and bitter cold.

When I forced myself away from my fire before dark, and ran down to the stable to see about feeding and bedding the horses and cows, every beast had its head drawn in towards its shoulders, and looked

at me with the dismal air of saying, 'Who is tempering the wind now?' The dogs in the kennel, with their noses between their hind-legs, were shivering under their blankets and straw like a nest of chilled young birds. The fowls on the roost were mere white and blue puffs of feathers. Nature alone has the keeping of her creatures; why doesn't she make them comfortable?

After supper old Jack and Dilsy came in, and standing against the wall with their arms folded, told me more of what happened after I got sick. That was about the middle of September, and it is only two weeks since I became well enough to go in and out through all sorts of weather.

It was the middle of September then, my servants said, and as within a week after taking the fever I was very ill, a great many people came out to inquire for me. Some of these, walking around the garden, declared it was a pity for such fruit and flowers to be wasted, and so helped themselves freely every time. The old doctor, who always fears for my health at this season, stopped by nearly every day to repeat how he had warned me, and always walked back to his gig in a roundabout way, which required him to pass a favourite tree; and once he was so indignant to find several other persons gathered there, and mournfully enjoying the last of the fruit as they

Putting a prop under a too-heavily laden limb.

predicted I would never get well, that he came back to the house—with two pears in each duster pocket and one in his mouth—and told Jack it was an outrage. The preacher, likewise, who appears in the spring-time, one afternoon knocked reproachfully at the front door and inquired whether I was in a condition to be reasoned with. In his hand he carried a nice little work-basket, which may have been brought along to catch his prayers ; but he took it home piled with grapes.

And then they told me, also, how many a good and kind soul came with hushed footsteps and low inquiries, turning away sometimes with brightened faces, sometimes with rising tears—often people whom I had done no kindness or whom I did not know ; how others whom I had quarrelled with or did not like, forgot the poor puny quarrels and the dislike, and begged to do for me whatever they could ; how friends went softly around the garden, caring for a flower, putting a prop under a too-heavily laden limb, or climbing on step-ladders to tie sacks around the finest bunches of grapes, with the hope that I might be well in time to eat them—touching nothing themselves, having no heart to eat ; how dear, dear ones would never leave me day or night ; how a good doctor wore himself out with watching, and a good pastor sent up for me his spotless prayers ; and at last, when I began to mend, how from far and near there

poured in flowers and jellies and wines, until, had I been the multitude by the Sea of Galilee, there must have been baskets to spare. God bless them! God bless them all! And God forgive us all the blindness, the weakness, and the cruelty with which we judge each other when we are in health.

This and more my beloved old negroes told me a few hours ago, as I sat in deep comfort and bright health again before my blazing hickories; and one moment we were in laughter and the next in tears—as is the strange life we live. This is a gay household now, and Dilsy cannot face me without a fleshy earthquake of laughter that I have become such a high-tempered tiger about punctual meals.

In particular, my two nearest neighbours were much at odds as to which had better claim to nurse me; so that one day Mrs. Walters, able to endure it no longer, thrust Mrs. Cobb out of the house by the shoulder-blades, locked the door on her, and then opened the shutters and scolded her out of the window.

One thing I miss. My servants have never called the name of Georgiana. The omission is unnatural, and must be intentional. Of course I have not asked whether she showed any concern; but that little spot of silence affects me as the sight of a tree remaining leafless in the woods where everything else is turning green.

Thrust Mrs. Cobb out of the house.

XI

TO-DAY I was standing at a window, looking out at the aged row of cedars, now laden with snow, and thinking of Horace and Soracte. Suddenly, beneath a jutting pinnacle of white boughs which left under themselves one little spot of

green, I saw a cardinal hop out and sit full-breasted towards me. The idea flashed through my mind that this might be that shyest, most beautiful fellow whom I had found in September, and whom I tried to make out as the son of my last winter's pensioner. At least he has never lived in my yard before; for when, to test his shyness, I started to raise the window-sash, at the first noise of it he was gone. My birds are not so afraid of me. I must get on better terms with this stranger.

Mrs. Walters over for a while afterwards. I told her of my fancy that this bird was one of last summer's brood, and that he appeared a trifle larger than any male I had ever seen. She said of course. Had I not fed the parents all last winter? When she fed her hens, did they not lay bigger eggs? Did not bigger eggs contain bigger chicks? Did not bigger chicks become bigger hens, again? According to Mrs. Walters, a single winter's feeding of hot corn-meal, scraps of bacon, and pods of red pepper will all but bring about a variation of species; and so if the assumed rate at which I am now going were kept up a hundred years, my cedar-trees might be full of a race of red-birds as large and as fat as geese.

Standing towards sundown at another window, I saw Georgiana sewing at hers, as I have seen her every day since I got out of bed. Why should she sew so much? There is a servant also; and

When she fed her hens.

they sew, sew, sew, as if eternal sewing were eternal happiness, eternal salvation. The first day she sprang up, letting her work roll off her lap, and waved her handkerchief inside the panes, and smiled with what looked to me like radiant pleasure that I was well again. I was weak and began to tremble, and, going back to the fireside, lay back in my chair with a beating of the heart that was a warning. Since then she has recognised me only by a quiet, kindly smile. Why has no one ever called her name? I believe Mrs. Walters knows. She comes nowadays as if to tell me something, and goes away with a struggle that she has not told it. But a secret can no more stay in the depths of Mrs. Walters's mind than cork at the bottom of water; some day I shall see this mystery riding on the surface.

XII

ES, she knew; while unconscious I talked of Georgiana, of being in love with her. Mrs. Walters added, sadly, that Georgiana came home in the fall engaged to that New York cousin. Hence the sewing — he was to marry her in June.

I am *not* in love with her. It is now four weeks since hearing this conventional fiction, and every day I have been perfectly able to repeat: 'I am *not* in love with Georgiana!' There was one question which I put severely to Mrs. Walters: Had she told Georgiana of my foolish talk? She shook her head violently, and pressed her lips closely together, suggesting how impossible it

would be for the smallest monosyllable in the language to escape by that channel; but she kept her eyes wide open, and the truth issued from them, as smoke in a hollow tree, if stopped in at a lower hole, simply rises and comes out at a higher one. 'You should have shut your eyes also,' I said. 'You have told her every word of it, and the Lord only knows how much more.'

This February has let loose its whole pack of grizzly sky-hounds. Unbroken severe weather. Health has not returned as rapidly as was promised, and I have not ventured outside the yard. But it is a pleasure to chronicle the beginning of an acquaintanceship between his proud eminence the young cardinal and myself. For a long time he would have naught to do with me, fled as I approached, abandoned the evergreens altogether and sat on the naked tree-tops, as much as threatening to quit the place altogether if I did not leave him in peace. Surely he is the shyest of his kind, and to my fancy, the most beautiful; and therefore Nature seems to have stored him with extra caution towards his arch-enemy.

But in the old human way I have taken advantage of his necessities. The north wind has been my friend against him. I have called in the aid of sleets and snows, have besieged him in his white castle behind the glittering array of his icicles with threats of starvation. So one day, dropping like a

glowing coal down among the other birds, he snatched a desperate hasty meal from the public poor-house table that I had spread under the trees.

It is the first surrender that decides. Since then some progress has been made in winning his confidence, but the struggle going on in his nature is plain enough still. At times he will rush away from me in utter terror ; at others he lets me draw a little nearer, without moving from a limb ; and now, after a month of persuasion, he begins to discredit the experience which he has inherited from centuries upon centuries of ancestors. In all that I have done I have tried to say to him : 'Don't judge me by mankind in general. With me you are safe. I pledge myself to defend you from enemies, high and low.'

This has not escaped the notice of Georgiana at the window, and more than once she has let her work drop to watch my patient progress and to bestow upon me a rewarding smile. Is there nearly always sadness in it, or is the sadness in my eyes ? If Georgiana's brother is giving her trouble, I'd like to take a hand-axe to *his* feet. I suppose I shall never know whether he cut her foot in two. She carries the left one a little peculiarly ; but so many women do that.

Sometimes, when the day's work is over and the servant is gone, Georgiana comes to the window and looks away towards the sunsets of winter, her

hands clasped behind her back, her motionless figure in relief against the darkness within, her face white and still. Being in the shadow of my own room, so that she could not see me, and knowing that I ought not to do it, but unable to resist, I have softly taken up the spy-glass which I use in the study of birds, and have drawn Georgiana's face nearer to me, holding it there till she turns away. I have noticed the traces of pain, and once the tears which she could not keep back and was too proud to shed. Then I have sat before my flickering embers, with I know not what all but ungovernable yearning to be over there in the shadowy room with her, and, whether she would or not, to fold my arms around her, and, drawing her face against mine, whisper, 'What is it, Georgiana? And why must it be?'

XIII

THE fountains of the great deep opened. A new heaven, a new earth. Georgiana has broken her engagement with her cousin. Mrs. Cobb let it out in the strictest confidence to Mrs. Walters. Mrs. Walters,

with stricter confidence still, has told me only.

The West-Pointer had been writing for some months in regard to the wild behaviour of his cousin. This grew worse, and the crisis came. Georgiana snapped her thread and put up her needle. He travelled all the way down here to implore. I met him at the gate as he left the house—a fine, straight, manly, handsome young fellow, his face pale with pain, and his eyes flashing with anger—and bade him a long, affectionate, inward God-speed as he hurried away. It was her father's influence. He had always wished for this union. Ah, the evils that come to the living from the wrongful wishes of the dead! Georgiana is so happy now, since she has been forced to free herself, that spring in this part of the United States seems to have advanced about half a month.

'What on earth will she do with all those clothes?' inquired Mrs. Walters the other night, eyeing me with curious impressiveness.

'Let them be hanged,' I said promptly.

There is a young scapegrace who passes my house morning and evening with his cows. He has the predatory instincts of that being who loves to call himself the image of his Maker, and more than once has given annoyance, especially last year, when he robbed a damson-tree of a brood of Baltimore orioles. This winter and spring his friendly

interest in my birds has increased, and several times I have caught him skulking among the pines. Last night what should I stumble on but a trap, baited and sprung, under the cedar-tree in which the cardinal roosts. I was up before daybreak this morning. Awhile after the waking of the birds here comes my young bird-thief, creeping rapidly to his trap. As he stooped I had him by the collar, and within the next five minutes I must have set up in his nervous system a negative disposition to the caging of red-birds that will descend as a positive tendency to all the generations of his offspring.

All day this meditated outrage has kept my blood up. Think of this beautiful cardinal beating his heart out against maddening bars, or caged for life in some dark city street, lonely, sick, and silent, bidden to sing joyously of that high world of light and liberty where once he sported! Think of the exquisite refinement of cruelty in wishing to take him on the eve of May!

It is hardly a fancy that something as loyal as friendship has sprung up between this bird and me. I accept his original shyness as a mark of his finer instincts; but, like the nobler natures, when once he found it possible to give his confidence, how frankly and fearlessly has it been given. The other day, brilliant, warm, windless, I was tramping across the fields a mile from home,

That whipping.

when I heard him on the summit of a dead sycamore, cleaving the air with stroke after stroke of his long melodious whistle, as with the swing of a silken lash. When I drew near he dropped down from bough to bough till he reached the lowest, a few feet from where I stood, and showed by every movement how glad he was to see me. We really have reached the understanding that the immemorial persecution of his race by mine is ended; and now more than ever my fondness settles about him, since I have found his happiness plotted against, and have perhaps saved his very life. It would be easy to trap him. His eye should be made to distrust every well-arranged pile of sticks under which lurks a morsel.

To-night I called upon Georgiana and sketched the arrested tragedy of the morning. She watched me curiously, and then dashed into a little treatise on the celebrated friendships of man for the lower creatures, in fact and fiction, from camels down to white mice. Her father must have been a remarkably learned man. I didn't like this. It made me somehow feel as though I were one of Æsop's Fables, or were being translated into English as that old school-room horror of Androclus and the Lion. In the bottom of my soul I don't believe that Georgiana cares for birds, or knows the difference between a blackbird and a crow. I

am going to send her a little story, 'The Passion of the Desert.' Mrs. Walters is now confident that Georgiana regrets having broken off her engagement. But then Mrs. Walters can be a great fool when she puts her whole mind to it.

XIV

IN April I commence to scratch and dig in my garden.

To-day as I was raking off my strawberry bed, Georgiana, whom I have not seen since the night when she satirised me, called from the window :

'What are you going to plant this year?'

'Oh, a little of everything,' I answered, under my hat. 'What are *you* going to plant this year?'

'Are you going to have many strawberries?'

'It's too soon to tell : they haven't bloomed yet. It's too soon to tell when they *do* bloom. Sometimes strawberries are like women : Whole beds full of showy blossoms ; but when the time comes to be ripe and luscious, you can't find them.'

'Indeed.'

'Tis true, 'tis pity.'

'I had always supposed that to a Southern gentleman woman was not a berry, but a rose. What does he hunt for in woman as much as bloom and fragrance? But I do not belong to the rose-order of Southern women myself. Sylvia does. Why did you send me that story?'

'Didn't you like it?'

'No. A woman couldn't care for a story about a man and a tigress. Either she would feel that she was too much left out, or suspect that she was too much put in. The same sort of story about a lion and a woman—that would be better.'

I raked in silence for a minute, and when I looked up Georgiana was gone. I remember her saying once that children should be kept tart; but now and then I fancy that she would like to keep even a middle-aged man in brine. Who knows but that in the end I shall sell my place to the Cobbs and move away.

Five more days of April, and then May! For the last half of this light-and-shadow month, when the clouds, like schools of changeable lovely creatures, seem to be playing and rushing away through the waters of the sun, life to me has narrowed more and more to the red-bird, who gets tamer and tamer with habit, and to Georgiana, who gets wilder and wilder with happiness. The bird fills the yard with brilliant singing; she fills

her room with her low, clear songs, hidden behind the window-curtains, which are now so much oftener and so needlessly closed. I work myself nearly to death in my garden, but she does not open them. The other day the red-bird sat in a tree near by, and his notes floated out on the air like scarlet streamers. Georgiana was singing, so low that I was making no noise with my rake in order to hear; and when he began, before I realised what I was doing, I had seized a brickbat and hurled it, barely missing him, and driving him away. He did not know what to make of it; neither did I; but as I raised my eyes I saw that Georgiana had opened the curtains to listen to him, and was closing them with her eyes on my face, and a look on hers that has haunted me ever since.

April the 26th. It's of no use. To-morrow night I will go to see Georgiana, and ask her to marry me.

April 28th. Man that is born of woman is of few days and full of trouble. I am not the least sick, but I am not feeling at all well. So have made a will, and left everything to Mrs. Walters. She has been over five times to-day, and this evening sat by me a long time, holding my hand and smoothing my forehead, and urging me to try

a cream poultice—a mustard-plaster—a bowl of gruel—a broiled chicken.

I believe Georgiana thinks I'll ask her again. Not if I lived by her through eternity! Thy rod and Thy staff—*they* comfort me.

XV

POOR devil will ask a woman to marry him. She will refuse him. The day after she will meet him as serenely as if he had asked her for a pin.

It is now May 15th, and I have not spoken to Georgiana when I've had a chance. She has

been entirely too happy, to judge from her singing, for me to get along with under the circumstances. But this morning, as I was planting a hedge inside my fence under her window, she leaned over and said, as though nothing were wrong between us, 'What are you planting?'

I have sometimes thought that Georgiana can ask more questions than Socrates.

'A hedge.'

'What for?'

'To grow.'

'What do you want it to grow for?'

'My garden is too public. I wish to be protected from outsiders.'

'Would it be the same thing if I were to nail up this window? That would be so much quicker. It will be ten years before your hedge is high enough to keep me from seeing you. And even then, you know, I could move upstairs. But I am so sorry to be an outsider.'

'I merely remarked that I was planting a hedge.'

When Georgiana spoke again her voice was lowered: 'Would you open a gateway for me into your garden, to be always mine, so that I might go out and come in, and never another human soul enter it?'

Now Jacob had often begged me to cut him a private gateway on that side of the garden, so that

only he might come in and go out; and I had refused, since I did not wish him to get to me so easily with his complaints. Besides, a gate once opened, who may not use it? and I was indignant that Georgiana should lightly ask anything at my hands; therefore I looked quickly and sternly up at her and said, 'I will not.'

Afterwards the thought rushed over me that she had not spoken of any gateway through my garden fence, but of another one, mystical, hidden, infinitely more sacred. For her voice descended almost in a whisper, and her face, as she bent down towards me, had on it I know not what angelic expression. She seemed floating to me from heaven.

May 17. To-day I put a little private gate through my fence under Georgiana's window, as a sign to her. Balaam's beast that I am! Yes, seven times more than the inspired ass.

As I passed to-day, I noticed Georgiana looking down at the gate that I made yesterday. She held a flower to her nose and eyes, but behind the leaves I detected that she was laughing.

'Good-morning!' she called to me. 'What did you cut that ugly hole in your fence for?'

'That's not an ugly hole. That's a little private gateway.'

'But what's the little private gateway *for?*'

'Oh, well! You don't understand these matters. I'll tell your mother.'

Looking down at the gate that I made yesterday.

'My mother is too old. She no longer stoops to such things. Tell *me!*'

'Impossible!'

'I'm dying to know.'

'What will you give me?'

'Anything—this flower!'

'But what would the flower stand for in that case? A little pri——'

'Nothing. Take it!' and she dropped it lightly on my face and disappeared. As I stood twirling it ecstatically under my nose, and wondering how I could get her to come back to the window, the edge of a curtain was lifted, and a white hand stole out and softly closed the shutters.

In the evening Sylvia went in to a concert of the school, which was to be held at the Court-house, a chorus of girls being impanelled in the jury-box, and the principal, who wears a little wig, taking her seat on the woolsack. I promised to have the very pick of the garden ready, and told Sylvia to come to the arbour the last thing before starting. She wore big blue rosettes in her hair, and at that twilight hour looked as lovely, soft, and pure as moonshine; so that I lost control of myself and kissed her twice—once for Georgiana and once for myself. Surely it must have been Sylvia's first experience. I hope so. Yet she passed through it with the composure of a graduate of several years' standing. But, then, women inherit a great stock of fortitude from their mothers in this regard, and perpetually add to it by their own dispositions. Ought I to warn Georgiana—good

heavens! in a general way, of course—that Sylvia should be kept away from sugar, and well under the influence of vulgar fractions?

It made me feel uncomfortable to see her go tripping out of her front gate on the arm of a youth. Can it be possible that *he* would try to do what *I* did? Men differ so in their virtues, and are so alike in their transgressions. This forward gosling displayed white duck pantaloons, brandished pumps on his feet, which looked flat enough to have been webbed, and was scented as to his marital locks with a far-reaching pestilence of bergamot and cinnamon.

After they were gone I strolled back to my arbour and sat down amid the ruins of Sylvia's flowers. The night was mystically beautiful. The moon seemed to me to be softly stealing down the sky to kiss Endymion. I looked across towards Georgiana's window. She was there, and I slipped over and stood under it.

'Georgiana,' I whispered, 'were you, too, looking at the moon?'

'Part of the time,' she said sourly. 'Isn't it permitted?'

'Sylvia left her scissors in the arbour, and I can't find them.'

'She'll find them to-morrow.'

'If they get wet, you know, they'll rust.'

'I keep something to take rust off.'

'Georgiana, I've got something to tell you about Sylvia.'

'What? That you kissed her?'

'N—o! Not *that*, exactly!'

'Good-night!'

May 21st. Again I asked Georgiana to be mine. I am a perfect fool about her. But she's coming my way at last—God bless her!

May 24th. I renewed my suit to Georgiana.

May 27th. I besought Georgiana to hear me.

May 28th. For the last time I offered my hand in marriage to the elder Miss Cobb. Now I am done with her for ever. I am no fool.

May 29th. Oh, *damn* Mrs. Walters.

XVI

THIS morning, the 3rd of June, I went out to pick the first dish of strawberries for my breakfast. As I was stooping down I heard a timid, playful voice at the window like the echo of a year ago: 'Are you the gardener?'

Since Georgiana will not marry me, if she would only let me alone!

'Old man, are you the gardener?'

'Yes, I'm the gardener. I know what you are.'

'How much do you ask for your strawberries?'

'They come high. Nothing of mine is to be as cheap hereafter as it has been.'

'I am so glad—for your sake. I should like to possess something of yours, but I suppose everything is too high now.'

'Entirely too high!'

'If I only could have foreseen that there would be an increase of value! As for me, I have felt that I am getting cheaper lately. I may have to *give* myself away soon. If I only knew of some one who loved the lower animals.'

'The fox, for instance?'

'Yes; do you know of any one who would accept the present of a fox?'

'Ahem! I wouldn't mind having a *tame* fox. I don't care much for wild foxes.'

'Oh, this one would get tame—in time.'

'I don't believe I know of any one just at present.'

'Very well. Sylvia will get the highest mark in arithmetic. And Joe is distinguishing himself at West Point. That's what I wanted to tell you. I'll send over the cream and sugar, and hope you will enjoy all your berries. We shall buy some in the market-house next week.'

Later in the forenoon I sent the strawberries over to Georgiana. I have a variety that is the shape of the human heart, and when ripe it matches in colour that brighter current of the heart through which runs the hidden history of our passions. All over the top of the dish I carefully laid these

heart-shaped berries, and under the biggest one, at the very top, I slipped this little note : 'Look at the shape of them, Georgiana! I send them all to you. They are perishable.'

This afternoon Georgiana sent back the empty dish, and inside the napkin was this note : 'They are exactly the shape and colour of my emery needle-bag. I have been polishing my needles in it for many years.'

Later, as I was walking to town, I met Georgiana and her mother coming out. No explanation had ever been made to the mother of that goose of a gate in our division fence ; and as Georgiana had declined to accept the sign, I determined to show her that the gate could now stand for something else. So I said : 'Mrs. Cobb, when you send your servants over for green corn, you can let them come through that little gate. It will be more convenient.'

Only, I was so angry and confused that I called her Mrs. Corn, and said that when she sent her little Cobbs over . . . etc., etc.

After Georgiana's last treatment of me I resolved not to let her talk to me out of her window. So about nine o'clock this morning I took a negro boy and set him to picking the berries, while I stood by, directing him in a deep, manly voice as to the best way of managing that intricate business.

Georgiana and her mother coming out.

Presently I heard Georgiana begin to sing to herself behind the curtains.

'Hurry up and fill that cup,' I said to him savagely. 'And that will do this morning. You can go to the mill. The meal's nearly out.'

When he was gone I called, in an undertone: 'Georgiana! Come to the window! Please! Oh, Georgiana!'

But the song went on. What was the matter? I could not endure it. There was one way by which perhaps she could be brought. I whistled long and loud again and again. The curtains parted a little space.

'I was merely whistling to the bird,' I said.

'I knew it,' she answered, looking as I had never seen her. 'Whenever you speak to him your voice is full of confidence and of love. I believe in it and like to hear it.'

'What do you mean, Georgiana?' I cried imploringly.

'Ah, Adam!' she said, with a rush of feeling. It was the first time she had ever called me by name. She bent her face down. Over it there passed a look of sweetness and sadness indescribably blended. 'Ah, Adam! you have asked me many times to *marry* you! Make me believe once that you *love* me! Make me feel that I could trust myself to you for life!'

'What else can I do?' I answered, stirred to

the deepest that was in me, throwing my arms backward, and standing with an open breast into which she might gaze.

And she did search my eyes and face in silence.

'What more?' I cried again, 'in God's name?'

She rested her face on her palm, looking thoughtfully across the yard. Over there the red-bird was singing. Suddenly she leaned down towards me. Love was on her face now. But her eyes held mine with determination to wrest from them the last truth they might contain, and her voice trembled with doubt:

'Would you put the red-bird in a cage for me? Would you be willing to do that for me, Adam?'

At those whimsical, cruel words I shall never be able to reveal all that I felt—the surprise, the sorrow, the pain. Scenes of boyhood flashed through my memory. A conscience built up through years of experience stood close by me with admonition. I saw the love on her face, the hope with which she hung upon my reply, as though it would decide everything between us. I did not hesitate; my hands dropped to my side, the warmth died out of my heart as out of spent ashes, and I answered her, with cold reproach:

'I—will—not!'

The colour died out of her face also. Her

eyes still rested on mine, but now with pitying sadness.

'I feared it,' she murmured audibly, but to herself, and the curtains fell together.

Four days have passed. Georgiana has cast me off. Her curtains are closed except when she is not there. I have tried to see her; she excuses herself. I have written; my letters come back unread. I have lain in wait for her on the streets; she will not talk with me. The tie between us has been severed. With her it could never have been affection.

And for what? I ask myself over and over and over and over—for what? Was she jealous of the bird, and did she require that I should put it out of the way? Sometimes women do that. Did she take that means of forcing me to a test? Women do that. Did she wish to show her power over me, demanding the one thing she knew would be the hardest for me to grant? Women do that. Did she crave the pleasure of seeing me do wrong to humour her caprice? Women do that. But not one of these things can I even associate with the thought of Georgiana. I have sought in every way to have her explain, to explain myself. She will neither give nor receive an explanation.

I had supposed that her unnatural request would have been the end of my love, but it has not; that her treatment since would have fatally stung my

pride, but it has not. I understand neither; forgive both; love her now with that added pain which comes from a man's discovering that the woman dearest to him must be pardoned—pardoned as long as he shall live.

Never since have I been able to look at the red-bird with the old gladness. He is the reminder of my loss. Reminder? Do I ever forget? Am I not thinking of that before his notes lash my memory at dawn? All day can they do more than furrow deeper the channel of unforgetfulness? Little does he dream what my friendship for him has cost me. But this solace I have at heart—that I was not even tempted to betray him.

Three days more have passed. No sign yet that Georgiana will relent soon or ever. Each day the strain becomes harder to bear. My mind has dwelt upon my last meeting with her, until the truth about it wavers upon my memory like vague, uncertain shadows. She doubted my love for her. What proof was it she demanded? I must stop looking at the red-bird, lying here and there under the trees, and listening to him as he sings above me. My eyes devour him whenever he crosses my path with an uncomprehended fascination that is pain. How gentle he has become, and how, without intending it, I have deepened the perils of

his life by the very gentleness that I have brought upon him. Twice already the fate of his species has struck at him, but I have pledged myself to be his friend. This is his happiest season; a few days now, and he will hear the call of his young in the nest.

I shut myself in my workshop in the yard this morning. I did not wish my servants to know. In there I made a bird-trap such as I had often used when a boy. And late this afternoon I went to town and bought a bird-cage. I was afraid the merchant would misjudge me, and explained. He scanned my face silently. To-morrow I will snare the red-bird down behind the pines long enough to impress on his memory a life-long suspicion of every such artifice, and then I will set him free again in his wide world of light. Above all things, I must see to it that he does not wound himself or have the least feather broken.

It is far past midnight now, and I have not slept or wished for slumber.

Constantly since darkness came on I have been watching Georgiana's window for the light of her candle, but there has been no kindly glimmer yet. The only radiance shed upon the gloom outside comes from the heavens. Great cage-shaped white clouds are swung up to the firmament, and within these pale, gentle, imprisoned lightnings flutter

feebly to escape, fall back, rise, and try again and again, and fail.

. . . A little after dark this evening I carried the red-bird over to Georgiana. . . .

I have seen her so little of late that I did not know she had been away from home for days. But she was expected to-night, or, at furthest, to-morrow morning. I left the bird with the servant at the door, who could hardly believe what he saw. As I passed out of my front gate on my way there, the boy who returns about that time from the pasture for his cows joined me as I hurried along, attracted by the fluttering of the bird in the cage.

'Is it the red-bird? *I* tried to catch him once,' he said, with entire forgiveness of me, as having served him right, 'but I caught something else. I'll never forget that whipping. Oh, but wouldn't I like to have him! Mr. Moss, you wouldn't mind my trying to catch one of those little bits o' brown fellows, would you, that hop around under the pine-trees? They aren't any account to anybody. Oh my! but wouldn't I like to have *him!* May I bring my trap some time, and will you help me to catch one o' those little bits o' brown ones? You can't beat *me* catching them!'

Several times to-night I have gone across and listened under Georgiana's window. The servant must have set the cage in her room, for, as I

listened, I am sure I heard the red-bird beating his head and breast against the wires. A while ago I

'But wouldn't I like to have him!'

went again, and did not hear him. I waited a long time. . . . He may be quieted. . . .

Ah, if any one had said to me that I would ever do what I have done, with what full, deep joy could

I have throttled the lie in his throat! I put the trap under one of the trees where I have been used to feed him. When it fell he was not greatly frightened. He clutched the side of it, and looked out at me. My own mind supplied his words: 'Help! I'm caught! Take me out! You promised!' When I transferred him to the cage, for a moment his confidence lasted still. He mounted the perch, shook his plumage, and spoke out bravely and cheerily. Then all at once came on the terror.

The dawn came on this morning with its old splendour. The birds in my yard, as of old, poured forth their songs. But those loud, long, clear, melodious, deep-hearted, passionate, best-loved notes! As the chorus swelled from shadowy shrubs and vines to the sparkling tree-tops I listened for some sound from Georgiana's room, but over there I saw only the soft, slow flapping of the white curtains like signals of distress.

Towards ten o'clock, wandering restless, I snatched up a book which I had no wish to read, and went to the arbour where I had so often discoursed to Sylvia about children's cruelty to birds. Through the fluttering leaves the sunlight dripped as a weightless shower of gold, and the long pendants of young fruit swayed gently in their cool waxen greenness. Where some rotting planks crossed the top of the arbour a blue-jay sat on her

coarse nest; and presently the mate flew to her with a worm, and then talked to her in a low voice, as much as saying that they must now leave the place for ever. I was thinking how love softens even the voice of this file-throated screamer, when along the garden walk came the rustle of a woman's clothes, and, springing up, I stood face to face with Georgiana.

'What have you done?' she implored.

'What have *you* done?' I answered as quickly.

'Oh, Adam, *Adam!* You have killed it! How could you? How could you?'

'. . . Is he dead, Georgiana? Is he dead? . . .'

I forgot everything else, and pulling my hat down over my eyes, turned from her in the helpless shock of silence that came with those irreparable words.

Then, in ungovernable anger, suffering, remorse, I turned upon her where she sat: 'It is *you* who killed him! Why do you come here to blame me? And now you pretend to be sorry. You felt no pity when pity would have done some good. Trifler! Hypocrite!'

'It is false!' she cried, her words flashing from her whole countenance, her form drawn up to repel the shock of the blow.

'Did you not ask for him?'

'No!'

'Oh, deny it all! It is a falsehood—invented

by me on the spot. You know nothing of it! You did not ask me to do this! And when I have

'What have you done?' she implored.

yielded, you have not run to reproach me here and to cry, "How could you? How could you?"'

'No! No! Every word of it——'

'Untruth added to it all! Oh, that I should have been so deceived, blinded, taken in!'

'*Adam!*'

'Lovely innocence! It is too much! Go away!'

'I will not stand this any longer!' she cried. 'I will go away; but not till I have told you why I have acted as I have.'

'It is too late for that! I do not care to hear!'

'Then you *shall* hear!' she replied. 'You shall know that it is because I have believed you capable of speaking to me as you have just spoken: believed you at heart unsparing and unjust. You think I asked you to do what you have done? No! I asked you whether you would be willing to do it; and when you said you would not, I saw then—by your voice, your eyes, your whole face and manner—that you would. Saw it as plainly at that moment, in spite of your denial, as I see it now—the cruelty in you, the unfaithfulness, the willingness to betray. It was for this reason—not because I heard you refuse, but because I saw you consent—that I could not forgive you.'

She paused abruptly and looked across into my face. What she may now have read in it I do not know. Then anger swept her on:

'How often have I not heard you bitter and contemptuous towards people because they are treacherous, cruel! How often have you talked

of your love of nature, of our inhumanity towards lower creatures! But what have you done?

'You set your fancy upon one of these creatures, lie in wait for it, beset it with kindness, persevere in overcoming its wildness. You are amused, delighted, proud of your success. One day—you remember?—it sang as you had always wished to hear it. It annoyed you, and you threw a stone at it. With a little less angry aim you would have killed it. I have never seen anything more inhuman. How do I know that some day you would not be tired of me, and throw a stone at *me?* When a woman submits to this once, she will have them thrown at her whenever she sings at the wrong time, and she will never know when the right time is.

'Then you thought you were asked to sacrifice it, and now you have done that. How do I know that some day you might not be tempted to sacrifice me?' She paused, her voice breaking, and remained silent, as if unable to get beyond that thought.

'If you have finished,' I said very quietly, 'I have something to say to you, and we need not meet after this.

'I trapped the bird; you trapped me. I understood you to ask something of me, to cast me off when I refused it. Such was my faith in you that beneath your words I did not look for a snare. How hard it was for me to forgive you what you

asked is my own affair now; but forgive you I did. How hard it was to grant it that also is now, and will always be, my own secret. I beg you merely to believe this: knowing it to be all that you have described—and far more than you can ever understand—still, I did it. Had you demanded of me something worse, I should have granted that. If you think a man will not do wrong for a woman, you are mistaken. If you think men always love the wrong that they do for the women whom they love, you are mistaken again.

'You have held up my faults to me. I knew them before. I have not loved them. Do not think that I am trying to make a virtue out of anything I say; but in all my thoughts of you there has been no fault of yours that I have not hidden from my sight, and have not resolved as best I could never to see. Yet do not dream that I have found you faultless.

'You fear I might sacrifice you to something else. It is possible. Every man resists temptation only to a certain point; every man has his price. It is a risk you will run with any.

'If you doubt that a man is capable of sacrificing one thing that he loves to another that he loves more, tempt him, lie in wait for his weakness, ensnare him in the toils of his greater passion, and learn the truth.

'I make no defence—believe all that you say.

But had you loved me, I might have been all this, and it would have been nothing'

With this I walked slowly out of the arbour, but Georgiana stood beside me. Her light touch was on my arm.

'Let me see things clearly!'

'You have a lifetime in which to see things clearly,' I answered. 'How can that concern me now?' And I passed on into the house.

During the morning I wandered restless. For a while I lay on the grass down behind the pines. How deep and clear are the covered springs of memory! All at once it was a morning in my boyhood on my father's farm. I, a little Saul of Tarsus among the birds, was on my way to the hedge-rows and woods, as to Damascus, breathing out threatenings and slaughter. Then suddenly the childish miracle, which no doubt had been preparing silently within my nature, wrought itself out; for from the distant forest trees, from the old orchard, from thicket and fence, from the wide green meadows, and down out of the depths of the blue sky itself, a vast chorus of innocent creatures sang to my newly opened ears the same words: 'Why persecutest thou me?' One sang it with indignation; another with remonstrance; still another with resignation; others yet with ethereal sadness or wild elusive pain. Once more

the house-wren met me at the rotting gate-post, and cried aloud, '*per-se-cu-test—per-se-cu-test—per-se-cu-test—per-se-cu-test!*' And as I peeped

A little Saul of Tarsus.

into the brush-pile, again the brown thrush, building within, said, '*thou—thou—thou!*'

Through all the years since I had thought myself changed, and craved no greater glory than

to be accounted the chief of their apostles. But now I was stained once more with the old guilt, and once more I could hear the birds in my yard singing that old, old chorus against man's inhumanity.

Towards the middle of the afternoon I went away across the country—by any direction; I cared not what. On my way back I passed through a large rear lot belonging to my neighbour, and adjoining my own, in which is my stable. There has lately been imported into this part of Kentucky from England the much-prized breed of the beautiful white Berkshire. As I crossed the lot, near the milk-trough, ash-heap, and parings of fruit and vegetables thrown from my neighbour's kitchen, I saw a litter of these pigs having their awkward sport over some strange red plaything, which one after another of them would shake with all its might, root and tear at, or tread into greater shapelessness. It was all there was left of him. If I could have been spared the sight of that!

I entered my long yard. The sun was setting. Around me was the last peace and beauty of the world. Through a narrow avenue of trees I could see my house, and on its clustering vines fell the angry red of the sun darting across the cool green fields.

The last hour of light touches the birds as it

touches us. When they sing in the morning, it is with the happiness of the earth; but as the shadows fall strangely about them, and the helplessness of the night comes on, their voices seem to be lifted up like the loftiest poetry of the human spirit, with sympathy for realities and mysteries past all understanding.

A great choir was hymning now. On the tops of the sweet old honeysuckles the cat-birds; robins in the low boughs of maples; on the high limb of the elm the silvery-throated lark, who had stopped as he passed from meadow to meadow; on a fence rail of the distant wheat-field the quail —and many another. I walked to and fro, receiving the voice of each as a spear hurled at my body. The sun sank. The shadows rushed on and deepened. Suddenly, as I turned once more in my path, I caught sight of the figure of Georgiana moving straight towards me from the direction of the garden. She was bare-headed, dressed in white; and she advanced over the smooth lawn, through evergreens and shrubs, with a gentle grace and dignity of movement such as I had never beheld. I kept my weary pace, and when she came up I did not lift my eyes.

'Adam!' she said, with gentle reproach. I stood still then, but with my face turned away.

'Forgive me!' All girlishness was gone out of her voice. It was the woman at last.

I turned my face farther from her, and we stood in silence.

'I have suffered enough, Adam,' she pleaded.

I answered quietly, doggedly, for there was nothing left in me to appeal to:

'I am glad we can part kindly. . . . Neither of us may care much for the kindness now, but we will not be sorry hereafter. . . . The quarrels, the mistakes, the right and the wrong of our lives, the misunderstandings—they are so strange, so pitiful, so full of pain, and come so soon to nothing.' And I lifted my hat, and took the path towards my house.

There was a point ahead where it divided, the other branch leading towards the little private gate through which Georgiana had come. Just before reaching the porch I looked that way, with the idea that I should see Georgiana's white figure moving across the lawn; but I discovered that she was following me. Mounting my door-steps, I turned. She had paused on the threshold. I waited. At length she said, in a voice low and sorrowful:

'Are you not going to forgive me, Adam?'

'I do forgive you!' The silence fell and lasted. I no longer saw her face. At last her despairing voice barely reached me again:

'And—is—*that*—all?'

I had no answer to make, and sternly waited for her to go.

'*And—is—that—all?*'

A moment longer she lingered, then turned slowly away; and I watched her figure growing fainter and fainter till it was lost. I sprang after

Set our candles in our windows.

her, my voice rang out hollow, and broke with terror and pain and longing:

'Georgiana! Georgiana!'

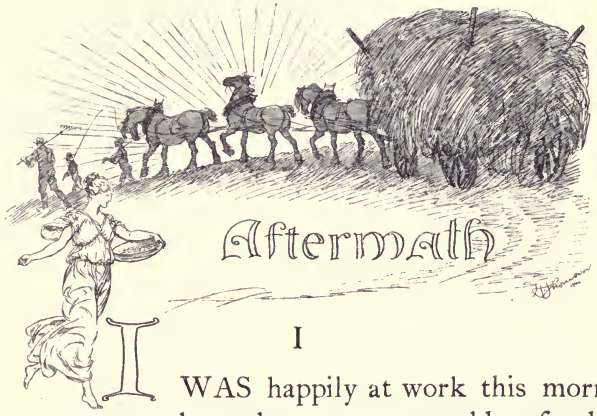
'Oh, Adam, *Adam!*' I heard her cry, with low, piercing tenderness, as she ran back to me through the darkness.

When we separated we lighted fresh candles and set them in our windows, to burn a pure pathway of flame across the intervening void. Henceforth we are like poor little foolish children, sick and lonesome in the night without one another. Happy, happy night to come when one short candle will do for us both !

. . . . . .

. . . Ah, but the long, long silence of the trees ! . . .

AFTERMATH



I

I WAS happily at work this morning among my butterbeans—a vegetable of solid merit and of far greater suitableness to my palate than such bovine watery growths as the squash and the beet. Georgiana came to her garden window and stood watching me.

'You work those butterbeans as though you loved *them*,' she said scornfully.

'I do love them. I love all vines.'

'Are you cultivating them as vines or as vegetables?'

'It makes no difference to Nature.'

'Do you expect me to be a vine when we are married?'

'I hope you'll not turn out a mere vegetable. How should you like to be a Virginia-creeper?'

'And what would you be?'

'What would you like? A sort of honeysuckle frame?'

'Anything! Only support me and give me room to bloom.'

I do not always reply to Georgiana, though I always could if I chose. Whenever I remain silent about anything she changes the subject.

'Did you know that Sylvia once wrote a poem on a vegetable?'

'I did not.'

'You don't speak as though you cared.'

'You must know how deeply interested I am.'

'Then why don't you ask to see the poem?'

'What was it on?—butterbeans?'

'Sylvia has better taste.'

'I suppose I'd better look into this poem.'

'You are not to laugh at it.'

'I shall weep.'

'Promise.'

'What am I to promise?'

'That you will read it without laughing.'

'I do promise—solemnly, cheerfully.'

'Come and get it.'

I went over and stood under the window. Georgiana soon returned and dropped down to me a piece of writing-paper.

'Sylvia wrote it before she began to think about boys.'

'It must be a very early poem of hers!'

'It is; and this is the only copy; don't lose it.'

'Then I think you ought to take it back at once. Let me beg of you not to risk it——' But she was gone; and I turned to my arbour and sat down to read Sylvia's poem, which I found to be inscribed to 'The Potato,' and to run as follows:

What on this wide earth
That is made or does by nature grow
Is more homely yet more beautiful
Than the useful Potato?

What would this world full of people do,
Rich and poor, high and low,
Were it not for this little-thought-of
But very necessary Potato?

True, 'tis homely to look on,
Nothing pretty even in its blow,
But it will bear acquaintance,
This useful Potato.

For when it is cooked and opened
It's so white and mellow,
You forget it ever was homely,
This useful Potato.

On the whole it is a very plain plant,
Makes no conspicuous show,
But the internal appearance is lovely
Of the unostentatious Potato.

On the land or on the sea,
Wherever we may go,
We are always glad to welcome
The sound Potato.[1]

In the afternoon I was cutting stakes at the wood-pile for my butterbeans, and a bright idea struck me. During my engagement to Georgiana I cannot always be darting in and out of Mrs. Cobb's front door like a swallow through a barn. Neither can I talk freely to Georgiana—with her up at the window and me down on the ground—when I wish to breathe into her ear the things that I must utter or die. Besides, the sewing-girl whom Georgiana has engaged is nearly always there. So that as I was in the act of trimming a long slender stick, it occurred to me that I might make use of this to elevate any little notes that I might wish to write.

I was greatly taken with the thought, and, dropping my hand-axe, hurried into the house and wrote a note to her at once, which I thereupon tied to the end of the pole by a short string. But as I started for the garden this arrangement looked too much like catching

[1] The elder Miss Cobb was wrong in thinking this poem Sylvia's. It was extant at the time over the signature of another writer, whose authorship is not known to have been questioned. Miss Sylvia perhaps adopted and adapted it out of admiration, or as a model for her own use. J. L. A.

Georgiana with a bait. Therefore, happening to remember, I stopped at my tool-house, where I keep a little of everything, and took from a peg a fine old specimen of a goldfinch's nest. This I fastened to the end of the pole, and hiding my note in it, now felt better satisfied. No one but Georgiana herself would ever be able to tell what it was that I might wish to lift up to her at any time; and in case of its being not a note, but a plum—a berry—a peach—it would be as safe as it was unseen. This old house of a pair of goldfinches would thus become the home of our fledgling hopes: every day a new brood of vows would take flight across its rim into our bosoms.

Watching my chance during the afternoon, when the sewing-girl was not there, I rushed over and pushed the stick up to the window.

'Georgiana,' I called out, 'feel in the nest!'

She hurried to the window with her sewing in her arms. The nest swayed to and fro on a level with her nose.

'What is it?' she cried, drawing back with extreme distaste.

'Feel in it!' I repeated.

'I don't wish to feel in it,' she said. 'Take it away!'

'There's a young dove in it,' I persisted—'a young cooer.'

'I don't wish any young cooers,' she said, with a grimace.

Seeing that she was not of my mind, I added, pleadingly: 'It's a note from me, Georgiana. This is going to be our little private post-office!' Georgiana sank back into her chair. She reappeared with the flush of apple-blossoms and her lashes wet with tears of laughter. But I do not think that she looked at me unkindly. 'Our little private post-office,' I persisted confidingly.

'How many more little private things are we going to have?' she inquired plaintively.

'I can't wait here for ever,' I said. 'This is growing weather; I might sprout.'

'A dry stick will not,' said Georgiana simply, and went back to her sewing.

I took the hint, and propped the pole against the house under the window. Later, when I took it down, my note was gone.

I have set the pole under Georgiana's window several times within the last two or three days. It looks like a little dip-net, high and dry in the air; but so far as I can see with my unaided eye, it has caught nothing so large as a gnat. It has attracted no end of attention from the birds of the neighbourhood, however, who never saw a goldfinch's nest swung to the end of a leafless pole and placed where it could be so exactly reached by the human hand. In particular, it has fallen under

the notice of a pair of wrens, which are like women, in that they usually have some secret business behind their curiosity. The business in this case is the matter of their own nest, which they have located in a broken horse-collar in my saddle-house. At such seasons they are alert for appropriating building materials that may have been fetched to hand by other birds; and they have already abstracted a piece of candle-wick from the bottom of my post-office.

Georgiana has been chilly towards me for two days, and I think is doing her best not to freeze up altogether. I have racked my brain to know why; but I fear that my brain is not of the sort to discover what is the matter with a woman when nothing really is the matter. Moreover, as I am now engaged to Georgiana, I have thought it better that she should begin to bring her explanations to me—the steady sun that will melt all her uncertain icicles.

At last this morning she remarked, but very carelessly, 'You didn't answer my note.'

'What note, Georgiana?' I asked, thunderstruck.

She gave me such a look.

'Didn't you get the note I put into that—into that——' Her face grew pink with vexation.

'Did you put a note into the—into the——' I could not have spoken the word just then.

I retired to my arbour, where I sat for half an hour with my head in my hands. What could have become of Georgiana's note? A hand might have filched it; unlikely. A gust of wind might have whisked it out; impossible. I debated and rejected every hypothesis to the last one. Acting upon this, I walked straight to the saddle-house, and in a dark corner peered at the nest of the wrens. A speck of white paper was visible among the sticks and shavings. I tore the nest out and shook it to pieces. How those wrens did rage! The note was so torn and mudded that I could not read it. But suppose a jay had carried it to the high crotch of some locust! I ran joyfully back to the window.

'I've found it, Georgiana!' I called out.

She appeared, looking relieved, but not exactly forgiving.

'Where?'

My tongue froze to the roof of my mouth.

'Where did you find it?' she repeated imperiously.

'What do you want to know for?' I said savagely.

'Let me see it!' she demanded.

My clasp on it suddenly tightened.

'Let me see it!' she repeated, with genuine fire.

'What do you want to see it for?' I said.

She turned away.

'Here it is,' I said, and held it up.

She looked at it a long time, and her brows arched.

'Did the mud-daubers have it?'

'The wrens. It was merely a change of post-office.'

'I'd as well write the next one to them,' she said, 'since they get the letters.'

Georgiana was well aware that she slipped the note into the nest when they were looking and I was not; but women—*all* women—now and then hold a man responsible for what they have done themselves. Sylvia, for instance. She grew peevish with me the other day because my garden failed to furnish the particular flowers that would have assuaged her whim. And yet for days Sylvia has been helping herself with such lack of stint that the poor clipped and mangled bushes look at me as I pass sympathetically by them, and say, 'If you don't keep her away, we'd as well be weeds!'

The truth is that Sylvia's rampant session in school, involving the passage of the Greatest Common Divisor—far more dreadful than the passage of the Beresina—her blue rosettes at the recent Commencement, and the prospect of a long vacation, together with further miscellany appertaining to her age and sex, have strung the chords of her

sentimental being up to the highest pitch. Feeling herself to be naturally a good instrument and now

Sylvia and the gosling.

perfectly in tune, Sylvia requires that she shall be continually played upon—if not by one person, then by another. Nature overloads a tendency in order to make it carry straight along its course

Dropped him out into the street.

against the interference of other tendencies; and she will sometimes provide a girl with a great many young men, at the start, in order that she may be sure of one husband in the end. The precautionary swarm in Sylvia's case seems multitudinous enough to supply her with successive husbands to the end of her days and in the teeth of all known estimates of masculine mortality. How unlike Georgiana!

I think of Georgiana as the single peach on a tree in a season when they are rarest. Not a very large peach, and scarcely yet yielding a blush to the sun, although its long summer heat is on the wane; growing high in the air at the end of a bough and clustered about by its shining leaves. But what beauty, purity, freshness! You must hunt to find it and climb to reach it; but when you get it, you get it all—there is not a trace left for another. But Sylvia! I am afraid Sylvia is like a big bunch of grapes that hangs low above a public pathway: each passer-by reaches up and takes a grape.

I caught some one taking a grape the other evening—a sort of green grape. Sylvia had been sending bouquets to the gosling who was her escort on the evening of her Commencement—him of the duck trousers and webbed feet. On one occasion I have observed her walking along the borders of my garden in his company and have overheard her

telling him that *he* could come in and get flowers whenever he wished.

To cap the climax, after twilight on the evening in question, I strolled out to my arbour for a quiet hour with thoughts of Georgiana. Whom should I surprise in there but Sylvia and the gosling! deep in the shadow of the vines. He had his arm around her and was kissing her.

'Upon my honour!' I said; and striding over to him I thrust my hand under his coat-tails, gripped him by the seat of his ducks, dragged him head downward to the front fence and dropped him out into the street.

'Let me catch *you* in here kissing anybody again!' I said.

He had bit me viciously on one of my calves—which are sizable—as I had dragged him along; so that I had been forced to stoop down and twist him loose by screwing the end of his spongy nose. I met him on the street early the next morning, and it wore the hue of a wild plum in its ripeness. I tapped it.

'Only three persons know of your misbehaviour last night,' I said. 'If you ever breathe it to a soul that you soiled that child by your touch, the next time I get hold of you it will not be your nose: it will be your neck!'

My mortification at Sylvia's laxness was so keen that I should have forborne returning to the arbour

I tapped it.

had I not felt assured that she must have escaped to the house through modesty and sheer shame. But she had not budged.

'I blush for you, Sylvia!' I exclaimed. 'I know all about that fellow! He shouldn't kiss—my old cat!'

'I don't see what *you* have to do with it!' said Sylvia placidly. 'And I have waited to tell you that I hope you will never interrupt me again when I am engaged in entertaining a young gentleman.'

'Sylvia, my dear child!' I said gravely, sitting down beside her. 'How old are you?'

'I am of the proper age to manage my own affairs,' said Sylvia, 'with the assistance of my immediate family.'

'Well, I don't think you are,' I replied. 'And since your brother is at West Point, there is one thing that I am going to take the liberty of telling you, which the other members of your family may not fully understand. If you were younger, Sylvia, you might do a good deal of this and not be hurt by it; or you might not be hurt by it if you were a good deal older; but at your age it is terrible; in time it will affect your character.'

'How old must I be?' said Sylvia wickedly.

'Well, in your case,' I replied warmly, a little nettled by her tone, 'you'd better abstain altogether.'

'And in your case?' said Sylvia.

'Never mind my case!' I retorted.

'But I do mind it when I suffer by it,' said Sylvia. 'I do mind it if it's going to affect my character!'

'You know very well, Sylvia,' I replied, 'that I never kissed you but three times, and then as a brother.'

'I do not wish any one but my brother to kiss me in that way,' said Sylvia, with a pout of disappointment.

It seemed to me that this was a fitting time to guide Sylvia's powers of discrimination as to the way she should act with indifferent men—and as to the way that different men would try to act with her.

I had been talking to her in a low tone I do not know how long. Her ill-nature had quickly vanished: she was, in her way, provoking, charming. I was sitting close to her. The moonlight played upon her daring, wilful face through the leaves of the grape-vines. It was unpremeditated; my nature was, most probably, unstrung at the instant by ungratified longings for Georgiana; but suddenly I bent down and kissed her.

Instantly both Sylvia and I started from the seat. How long Georgiana had been standing in the entrance to the arbour I do not know. She may that instant have come. But there she was, dressed in white—pure, majestic, with the moon

'Sylvia, my dear child, how old are you?'

shining behind her, shedding about her the radiance of a heavenly veil.

'Come, Sylvia,' she said, with perfect sweetness; and, bidding me good-night with the same gentlewoman's calm, she placed her arm about the child's waist, and the two sisters passed slowly and silently out of my garden.

At that moment, if I could have squeezed myself into the little screech-owl perched in a corner of the arbour, I would gladly have crept into the hollow of an oak and closed my eyes. Still, how was I to foresee what I should do? A man's conversation may be his own; his conduct may vibrate with the extinct movements of his ancestors.

Georgiana's behaviour then was merely the forerunner of larger marvels. For next morning I wrote a futile drastic treatise on Woman's inability to understand Man and Man's inability to understand Himself, and set it under her window. It made such a roll of paper that the goldfinch's nest looked as though it were distent with a sort of misshapen ostrich egg. All day I waited with a heart as silent as a great clock run down; my system of philosophy swung dead in the air. To my tortured vision, as I eyed it secretly from my porch, it took on the semblance of one of Sylvia's poetical potatoes, and I found myself urging in its behalf Sylvia's fondest epithets: 'how homely, yet how beautiful,' 'little thought of, but very

necessary,' 'unostentatious, but lovely internal appearance.'

Towards sunset I took it sadly down. On top of the nest lay Georgiana's old scarlet emery-bag stuck full of her needles! She had divined what all the writing meant and would not have it. Instead she sent me this emblem not only of her forgiveness, but of her surrender. When a man expects a woman to scold him and she does not, he either gets to be a little afraid of her morally or he wants to take her in his arms. Henceforth, if Georgiana were removed to another planet, I would rather worship her there simply as my evening or morning star than coexist with any earthly woman. One thought besets me: did she realise that perhaps she herself was the cause of my misdemeanours with Sylvia? Has she the penetration to discover that when a woman is engaged to a man she cannot deny him all things except at her own peril?

This proof of her high-mindedness and the enchanting glimpses of her face that she has vouchsafed me since, goaded me yesterday to dispatch a reckless note: 'Will you come to the arbour for a little while to-night? I have never dared ask this before, but you know how I have desired it. It is so much more private there. Write on the back of this paper one word, "Yes." There is a pencil in the nest.'

The shutters were nearly closed, but I caught sight of the curve of a shoulder and the movement of a busy hand. As I pushed the note up I said :

'Read it at once. I am waiting.'

A hand came out and took in the note, then the pencil ; then note and pencil were put back. On the former was written, 'Yes.'

I think I must have done a dozen things in five minutes, and then I started aimlessly off to town. On the way I met Georgiana.

'Good God, Georgiana!' I exclaimed. 'You *here?*'

'Where else?' said she. 'And why not?'

'I thought I just saw you at the window——' And then my awful soul within me said : 'H-sh-sh-sh! Not a word of this to a human being!'

After supper last night I called old Jack and Dilsy into the garden, and led them around it, giving orders ; thence to the arbour, where I bade them sit down.

In the year of 1805 Mr. Jefferson, as president of the Philosophical Society, ordered excavations to be made at Big Bone Lick in Kentucky for the skeletons of extinct animals. My father, who was interested in antiquities, had had much correspondence with Mr. Jefferson in regard to earlier discoveries at that spot ; and when this expedition was undertaken he formed one of the explorers.

Jack, his servant, at that time a strapping young fellow, had been taken along as one of the negroes who were to do the digging.

The wonders then unearthed have always been the greenest spot in old Jack's memory; so that they have been growing larger ever since. Whenever I wish to hear him discourse with the dogmatic bluster of a sage who had original information as to geological times, I set Jack to talking about the bones of the *Mastodon-Maximus*, the name of which he gets from me, with a puzzled shake of his head, about regularly once a year. It is my private opinion that old Jack believes Big Bone Lick to have been the place where the Ark settled, and these to have been the bones of animals that had been swept out by Noah on landing.

Last night I had merely to ask him whether he credited the story of an old traveller that he had once used some ribs found there for his tent-poles and a tooth for his hominy beater; whereupon Dilsy, foreseeing what was coming, excused herself on the plea of sudden rheumatism and went to bed, as I wished she should.

The hinges on the little private gate under Georgiana's window I keep rusty; this enables me to note when any one enters my garden. By-and-by I heard the hinges softly creak, whereupon I feigned not to believe what Jack was telling me; whereupon he fell into an harangue of such

affectionate and sustained vehemence that when the hinges creaked again I was never able to determine. Was ever such usage made before of an antediluvian monster?

To-day the sewing-girl thrust out spiteful faces at me several times.

She is the one that helped Georgiana last year when she was making her wedding-clothes to marry the West Point cousin. God keep him safely in the distance, or guide him firmly to the van of war! How does a woman feel when she is making her wedding-clothes for the second time and for another man? I know very well how the other man feels. Upon my urging Georgiana to marry me at once—nature does not recognise engagements; they are a device of civilisation—she protested:

'But I must get ready! Think of the sewing!'

'Oh, bother!' I grumbled. 'Where are all those clothes that you made last year?'

How was I to suppose that Georgiana must have everything made over as part of her feeling for me? I would not decree it otherwise; yet I question whether this delicacy may not impose reciprocal obligations, and remove from my life certain elements of abiding comfort. What if it should engender a prejudice against my own time-worn acquaintances—the familiars of my fireside? It might be justifiable sagacity in me to keep them

locked up for the first year or so after Georgiana and I become a diune being ; and, upon the whole, she should never know what may have been the premarital shortcomings of my wardrobe as respects things unseen. No matter how well a bachelor may appear dressed, there is no telling what he conceals as to his being darned or undarned. I feel sure that the retrospective discovery of a ravelling would somehow displease Georgiana as a feature of our courtship. Nature is very stringent here, very guarded, truly universal. Invariably the young men of my day grow lavish in the use of unguents when they are preparing for natural selection ; and I flatter myself that even my own garments—in their superficial aspects at least, and during my long pursuit of Georgiana—have not been very far from somewhat slightly ingratiating.

This pursuit is now drawing to a close. It is nearly the last of June. She has given me her word that she will marry me early in September. Two months for her to get the bridal feathers ready ; two for me to prepare the nest.

I have not yet breathed our engagement to Mrs. Walters. To tell her and not expect her to tell would be like giving a thump to the dry head of a thistle on a breezy day and not expecting the seed to go flying off in a hundred directions.

II

HAVE forgotten Nature. I barely know that July, now nearly gone, has passed, sifted with sweetness and ablaze with light. Time has swept on, the world run round; but I have stood motionless, abiding the hour of my marriage as a tree the season of its leaves. For all that it looks so calm, within goes on a tremendous surging of sap against its moments of efflorescence.

After which I pray that, not as a tree, but as a man, I may have a little peace. When Georgiana confessed her love, I had supposed this confession

to mark the end of her elusiveness. When later on she presented to me the symbol of a heart, pierced with needles, I had taken it for granted that thenceforth she would settle down into something like a state of prenuptial domestication, growing less like a swift and more like a hen. But there is nothing gallinaceous about my Georgiana. I took possession of her vow and the emery-ball, not of her; the privilege was merely given to plant my flagstaff on the uncertain edge of an unknown land. In war it sometimes becomes necessary to devastate a whole country in order to control a single point: I should be pleased to learn what portion of the earth's surface I am required to subdue ere I shall hold one little citadel.

As for me, Georgiana requires that I shall be a good deal like an old rock jutting out of the quiet earth: never ruffled, never changing either on the surface or at heart, bearing whatever falls upon me, be it frost or sun, and warranted to waste away only by a sort of impersonal disintegration at the rate of half an inch to the thousand years. Meantime she exacts for herself the privilege of dwelling near as the delighted cave of the winds. The part of wisdom in me then is not to heed each sallying gust, but to capture the cave and drive the winds away.

For I know in whom I have believed; I know

that this myriad caprice is but the deepening of excitement on the verge of captivity ; I know that

Sylvia performing.

on ahead lie the regions of perpetual calm — my Islands of the Blest.

Georgiana does not play upon the pianoforte, or, as Mrs. Walters would declare, she does not perform upon the instrument. Sylvia does; she performs, she executes. There are times when she will execute a piece called 'The Last Hope' until the neighbours are filled with despair and ready to stretch their heads on the block to any more merciful executioner. Nor does Georgiana sing to company in the parlour. That is Sylvia's gift; and upon the whole it was this unmitigated practice in the bosom—and in the ears—of her family that enabled Sylvia to shine with such vocal effulgence in the procession on the last Fourth of July and devote a pair of unflagging lungs to the service of her country.

But Georgiana I have never known to sing except when sewing and alone, as the way of women often is. During a walk across the summer fields my foot has sometimes paused at the brink of a silvery runlet, and I have followed it backward in search of the spring. It may lead to the edge of a dark wood; thence inward deeper and deeper; disappearing at last in a nook of coolness and shadow, green leaves and mystery. The overheard rill of Georgiana's voice issues from inner depths of being that no human soul has ever visited, or perhaps will ever visit. What would I not give to thread my way, bidden and alone, to that far region of uncaptured loveliness?

Of late some of the overheard lullabies have touched me inexpressibly. They beat upon my ear like the musical reveries of future motherhood —they betoken in Georgiana's maidenhood the dreaming unrest of the maternal.

One morning not long ago, with a sort of pitiful gaiety, her song ran in the wise of saying how we should gather our rosebuds while we may. The warning could not have been addressed to me; I shall gather mine while I may — the unrifled rose of Georgiana's life, heart and spirit.

Naturally she and I have avoided the subject of the Cardinal. But to the tragedy of his death was joined one circumstance of such coarse and brutal unconcern that it had left me not only remorseful but resentful. As we sat together the other evening, after one of those silences that fall unregarded between us, I could no longer forbear to face an understanding.

'Georgiana,' I said, 'do you know what became of the red-bird?'

Unwittingly the colour of reproach must have lain upon my words, for she answered quickly with yet more in hers:

'I had it buried!'

It was my turn to be surprised.

'Are you sure?'

'I am sure. I told them where to bury it; I

showed them the very spot—under the cedar. They told me they had. Why?'

I thought it better that she should learn the truth.

'You know we can't trust our negroes. They disobeyed you. They lied to you; they never buried it. They threw it on the ash-pile. The pigs tore it to pieces; I saw them; they were rooting at it and tearing it to pieces.'

She had clasped her hands, and turned towards me in acute distress. After a while, with her face aside, she said slowly:

'And you have believed that I knew of this—that I permitted it?'

'I have believed nothing. I have waited to understand.'

A few minutes later she said, as if to herself, 'Many a person would have been only too glad to believe it, and to blame me.' Then folding her hands over one of mine, she said, with tears in her eyes:

'Promise me—promise me, Adam, until we are married, and—yes, after we are married—as long as I live, that you will never believe anything of me until you know that it is true!'

'I do promise, dear, dear, dearest one!' I cried, trying to draw her to me, but she would not permit it. 'And you?'

'I shall never misunderstand,' she replied, as

with a flash of white inward light. 'I know that you can never do anything that will make me think the less of you.'

Since the sad, sad day on which I caused the death of the Cardinal, I have paid little heed to the birds. The subject has been a sore one. Besides, my whole life is gradually changing under the influence of Georgiana, who draws me farther and farther away from Nature, and nearer and nearer to my own kind.

When, two years ago, she moved into this part of the State, I dwelt on the outskirts of the town and of humanity. On the side of them lay the sour land of my prose; the country, nature, rolled away on the other side as the sweet deep ocean of my poetry. I called my neighbours my manifestations of prose; my doings with the townspeople, prose passages. The manifestations and passages scarce made a scrimp volume. There was Jacob, who lived on his symptoms and died without any; there was and there is Mrs. Walters —may she last to the age of the eagle. In town, a couple of prose items of cheap quality: an old preacher who was willing to save my soul while my strawberries were ripe, and an old doctor who cared to save my body so long as he could eat my pears—with others interested severally in my asparagus, my rhubarb, my lilies, and sweet-peas.

Always not forgetting a few inestimably wholesome, cheery, noble souls, who sought me out on the edge of human life rather than succeeded in drawing me over the edge towards the centre.

But this Georgiana has been doing — long without my knowing it. I have become less a woodsman, more a civilian. Unless she relents, it may end in my ceasing to be a lover of birds, and running for the legislature. Seeing me so much on the streets, one of my fellow-townsmen declared the other day that if I would consent to come out of the cane-brakes for good they would make me postmaster.

It has fallen awkwardly for me that this enforced transformation in my tastes and habits should coincide with the season of my love-making ; and it is well that Georgiana does not demand in me the capering or strutting manners of those young men of my day who likewise are exerting themselves to marry. I am more like a badger than like one of them ; and indeed I find the image of my fate and my condition in a badger-like creature close at hand.

For the carpenter who is at work upon bridal repairs in my house has the fancy not uncommon among a class hereabouts to keep a tamed raccoon. He brings it with him daily, and fastens it by its chain to a tree in my front yard : a rough, burly, knowing fellow, loving wild nature, but forced to

He was sitting on the front porch.

acquire the tediousness of civilisation; meantime leading a desperately hampered life; wondering at his own teeth and claws, and sorely put to it to invent a decent occupation. So am I; and as the raccoon paces everywhere after the carpenter, so do I in spirit pace everywhere after Georgiana; only his chain seems longer and more easily to be broken. The restless beast enlivens his captivity by the keenest scrutiny of every object within his range; I too have busied myself with the few people that have come this way.

First, early in the month Georgiana's brother—down from West Point, very stately, and with his brow stern, as if for gory war. When I called promptly to pay my respects, as his brother-in-law to be, he was sitting on the front porch surrounded by a subdued family, Georgiana alone remaining unawed. He looked me over indifferently, as though I were a species of ancient earthworks not worth any more special reconnaissance, and continued his most superior remarks to his mother on the approaching visit of three Generals.

Upon leaving I invited him to join me on the morrow in a squirrel hunt with small-bores, whereupon he manifested surprise that I was acquainted with the use of firearms. Whereupon I remarked that I would sometimes hit big game if it were so close that I could not miss it, and further urged him to have breakfast with me at a very early hour

in order that we might reach the woods while the squirrels were at theirs.

Going home, I knocked at the cabin where Jack and Dilsy lay snoring side by side with the velocity of rival saw-mills, and begged Dilsy to give me a bite about daybreak—coffee and corn-batter cakes—saying that I could get breakfast when I returned. I shared this scant bite with my young soldier—to Dilsy's abject mortification, I not having told her of his coming. Then we set off at a brisk pace towards a great forest south of the town some five miles away, where the squirrels had appeared and were doing great damage, being the last of a countless plague of them that overran northern and central Kentucky a year ago.

On the way I dragged him through several cane-brakes, a thicket of blackberry; kept him out all day; said not a word about dinner; avoided every spot where he could have gotten a swallow of water; not once sat down to rest; towards the middle of the afternoon told him I desired to take enough squirrels home to make Jack a squirrel-skin overcoat, and asked him to carry while I killed; loaded him with squirrels, neck, shoulders, breast, back and loins, till as he moved he tottered and swayed like a squirrel pyramid; about sundown challenged him to what he had not yet had, some crack shooting, which in

Then we set off at a brisk pace.

The three Generals.

that light requires young eyesight, and barked the squirrel for him four times ; later still snuffed the candle for him, having brought one along for the purpose ; and then, with my step fresh, led him swiftly home.

He has the blood of Georgiana in him, and stood it like a man. But he was nearly dead. He has saluted me since as though I were a murderous garrison intrenched on the Heights of Abraham.

Then the three Generals of the United States army descended in a body—or in three bodies ; and the truth is that their three bodies scarce held them, they were in such a state of flesh when they reached Kentucky, and of being perpetually overfed while they remained. The object of their joint visit under a recent act of Congress was to locate a military asylum for disabled soldiers ; and had they stayed much longer they must have had themselves admitted to their own institution as foremost of the disabled. Having spent some time at the Lower Blue Lick Springs, the proposed site,—where this summer are over five hundred guests of our finest Southern society,—they afterwards were drawn around with immense solidity towards Louisville, Frankfort, Maysville, Paris, and Lexington, being everywhere received with such honours and provisions that these great guns were in danger of becoming spiked for ever in both barrel and tube.

Upon reaching this town one of them detached himself from the heated rolling mass and accepted the invitation of young Cobb—who had formed the acquaintance at West Point—to make a visit in his home. He had not been there many days before he manœuvred to establish a private military retreat for himself in the affections of Mrs. Cobb. So that his presence became a profanation to Georgiana, whose reverence for her heroic father burns like an altar of sacred fire, and whose nature became rent in twain between her mother's suitor and her brother's guest.

A most pestiferous variety of caterpillar has infested the tops of my cherry-trees this summer, and during the General's encampment near Mrs. Cobb I happened several times to be mounted on my step-ladder, busy with my pruning-shears, when he was decoying her around her garden,—just over the fence,—buckled in to suffocation, and with his long epaulettes golden in the sun like tassels of the corn. I was engaged in exterminating this insect on the last day of his sojourn. They were passing almost beneath me on the other side; he had been talking; I heard her brief reply, in a voice low and full of dignity:

'I have *been* married, sir!'

'Mother of Georgiana!' I cried, within myself. But had she ever thought of taking a second husband she must have seen through 'Old Drum-

'I have been married, sir!'

beater,' as Sylvia called him. There were times when their breakfast would be late—for the sake of letting his chicken be broiled in slow perfection or his rolls or waffles come to a faultless brown; and I, being at work near the garden fence, would hear him tramping up and down the walk on the other side and swearing at a family that had such irregular meals. The camel, a lean beast, requires an extraordinary supply of food, which it proceeds to store away in its hump as nourishment to be drawn upon while it is crossing the desert. There may be no long campaigning before the General; but if there were and rations were short, why could he not live upon his own back? It is of a thickness, a roundness, and an impenetrability that would have justified Jackson in using him as a cotton-bale at the battle of New Orleans.

Thus in my little corner of the world we have all been at the same business of love, and I wonder whether the corner be not the world itself: Mrs. Cobb and the General, Georgiana and I, the sewing-girl and the carpenter; for I had forgotten to note how quickly these two have found out that they want each other. My arbour is at his service, if he wishes it; and Jack shall keep silent about the mastodon.

It is true that from this sentimental enumeration I have omitted the name of Mrs. Walters; but there is a secret here which not even Georgiana

herself will ever get from me. Mrs. Walters came to this town twenty years ago from the region of Bowling Green. Some years afterwards I made a trip into that part of the State to hear the mocking-bird—for it fills those more southern groves, but never visits ours ; and while there I stepped by accident on this discovery : *There never was any Mr. Walters.* It is her maiden name. But as I see the freedom of her life and reflect upon the things that a widow can do and an old maid cannot—with her own sex and with mine—I commend her wisdom and leave her at peace. Indeed I have gone so far, when she has asked for my sympathy, as to lament with her Mr. Walters's death. After all, what great difference is there between her weeping for him because he is no more, and her weeping for him because he never was? After which she freshens herself up with another handkerchief, a little Florida water, and a pigment of May roses from the apothecary's.

And I have omitted the name of Sylvia ; but then Sylvia's name, like that of Lot's wife, can never be used as one of a class, and she herself must always be spoken of alone. (If Sylvia had been Lot's wife, she would not have turned to a pillar of salt, she would most probably have become a geyser.)

I don't know why, but she went on a visit to Henderson after that evening in the arbour. I

The carpenter and the sewing-girl.

suspect the governing power of Georgiana's wisdom to have been put forth here, for within a few days I received from Sylvia a letter which she asked me not to show to Georgiana, and in which she invited me to correspond with her secretly. The letter was of a singularly glucose quality as to the emotions. Throughout she referred to herself as 'the exile,' although it was plain that she wrote in the highest spirits; and in concluding she openly charged Georgiana with having given her a black eye—a most unspeakable phrase, surely picked up in the schoolroom. As a return for the black eye, Sylvia said that she had composed a poem to herself, a copy of which she enclosed.

I quote Sylvia's commemorative verses upon her wrongs and her banishment. They show features of metrical excess, and can scarcely claim to reflect the polish of her calmer art; but they are of value to me as proving that whatever the rebuke Georgiana may have given, it had rebounded from that elastic spirit.

LINES TO MYSELF

Oh, she was a lovely girl,
So pretty and so fair,
With gentle, love-lit *eyes*,
And wavy, dark brown hair.

I loved the gentle girl,
  But oh, I heaved a sigh
When first she told me she could see
  Out of only *one* eye.

But soon I thought within myself
  I'd better save my tear and sigh
To bestow upon an older person I know
  Who has more than one eye.

She is brave and intelligent
  Too. She is witty and wise.
She'll accomplish more now than *another*
    person I know
Who has *two* eyes.

Ah, you need not pity *her!*
  She needs not your tear and sigh.
She'll make good use, I tell you,
  Of her *one* remaining eye.

In the home where we are hastening,
  In our eternal Home on High,
See that *you* be not rivalled
  By the girl with only *one* eye.[1]

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[1] Miss Sylvia could not have been speaking seriously when she wrote that she had 'composed' this poem. It is known to be the work of another hand, though Sylvia certainly tampered with the original and produced a version of her own.

J. L. A.

Rosettes of yellow ribbon.

Having thus dealt a thrust at Georgiana, Sylvia seems to have turned in the spirit of revenge upon her mother; and when she came home some days ago she brought with her a distant cousin of her own age—a boy, enormously fat—whom she soon began to decoy around the garden as her mother had been decoyed by the general. Further to satirise the similarity of lovers, she one day pinned upon his shoulders rosettes of yellow ribbon.

Sylvia has now passed from Scott to Moore; and several times lately she has made herself heard in the garden with recitations to the fat boy on the subject of Peris weeping before the gates of Paradise, or warbling elegies under the green sea in regard to Araby's daughter. There is real aptness in the latter reference; for this boy's true place in nature *is* the deep seas of the polar regions, where animals are coated with thick tissues of blubber. If Sylvia ever harpoons him, as she seems seriously bent on doing, she will have to drive her weapon in deep.

Yesterday she sprang across to me with her hair flying and an open letter in her hand.

'Oh, read it!' she cried, her face kindling.

It turned out to be a letter from the great Mr. Prentice, of the Louisville *Journal*, accepting a poem she had lately sent him, and assigning her a fixed place among his vast and twinkling galaxy of

Kentucky poetesses. The title of the poem was, 'My Lover kneels to none but God.'

'I infer from this,' I said gravely, 'that your lover is a Kentuckian.'

'He is,' cried Sylvia. 'Oh, his peerless haughty look!'

'Well, I congratulate you, Sylvia,' I continued mildly, 'upon having such an editor and such a lover; but I really think that your lover ought to kneel a little to Mr. Prentice on this one occasion.'

'Never!' cried Sylvia. 'He kneels only to God and me!'

'Some day when you meet Mr. Prentice, Sylvia,' I continued further, 'you will want to be very nice to him, and you might give him something new to parse.'

Sylvia studied me dubiously: the subject is not one that reassures her.

'Because the other day I heard a very great friend of Mr. Prentice's say of him that when he was fifteen he could parse every sentence in Virgil and Homer. And if he could do that then, think what he must be able to do now, and what pleasure his parsing passion must afford him!'

I would not imbitter Sylvia's joy by intimating that perhaps Mr. Prentice's studious regard for much of the poetry that he published was based upon the fact that only he could parse it.

She sprang across to me.

There has been the most terrible trouble with the raccoon.

This morning the carpenter tied him in my yard as usual; but some time during the forenoon, in a fit of rage at his confinement, he pulled the collar over his head and was gone. Whither and how long no one knew; but it seems that at last, by dint of fences and trees, he attained to the unapproachable distinction of standing on the comb of Mrs. Walters's house—poor Mrs. Walters, who has always held him in such deadly fear! she would as soon have had him on the comb of her head. Advancing along the roof, he mounted the chimney. Glancing down this, he perhaps reached the conclusion that it was more like nature and a hollow tree than anything that civilisation had yet been able to produce, and he proceeded to descend to the ground again by so dark and friendly a passage. His progress was stopped by a bundle of straw at the bottom, which he quickly tore away, and having emerged from a grove of asparagus in the fireplace, he found himself not on the earth, but in Mrs. Walters's bedroom. In what ways he now vented his ill-humour is not clear; but at last he climbed to the bed, white as no fuller could white it, and he dripping with soot. Here the ground beneath him was of such a suspicious and unreasonable softness that he apparently resolved to dig a hole and see what was the matter.

In the course of his excavation he reached Mrs. Walters's feather-bed, upon which he must have

Then her eyes caught sight.

fallen with fresh violence, tooth and nail, in the idea that so many feathers could not possibly mean feathers only.

'What is it, Mrs. Walters?'

It was about this time that Mrs. Walters returned from town, having left every window closed and every door locked, as is her custom. She threw open her door and started in, but paused, being greeted by a snow-storm of goose feathers that filled the air and now drifted outward.

'Why, what on earth is the matter?' she exclaimed, peering in, blank with bewilderment. Then her eyes caught sight of what had once been her bed. Sitting up in it was the raccoon, his long black jaws bearded with down, his head and ears stuck about with feathers, and his eyes blazing green with defiance.

She slammed and locked the door.

'Run for the sheriff!' she cried, in terror, to the boy who had brought her market basket; and she followed him as he fled.

'What is it, Mrs. Walters?' asked the sheriff, sternly, meeting her and bringing the handcuffs.

'There's somebody in my bed!' she cried, wringing her hands. 'I believe it's a ——.'

'It's my 'coon,' said the carpenter, laughing; for by this time we were all gathered together.

'What a foolish 'coon!' said the sewing-girl.

'Oh, Mrs. Walters! You are like Little Red Riding-hood!' said Sylvia.

'I can't arrest a 'coon, madam!' exclaimed the sheriff, red in the neck at being made ridiculous.

'Then arrest the carpenter!' cried poor, un-

happy, excited Mrs. Walters, bursting into tears and hiding her face on Georgiana's shoulder.

And among us all Georgiana was the only comforter. She laid aside her own work for that day, spent the rest of it as Samaritan to her desperately wounded neighbour, and at nightfall, over the bed, now peaceful and snowy once more, she spread a marvellous priceless quilt that she had long been making to exhibit at the approaching World's Fair at New York.

'Georgiana,' I said, as I walked home with her at bedtime, 'it seems to me that things happen in order to show you off.'

'Only think!' Georgiana replied; 'she will never get into bed again without a shiver and a glance at the chimney. I begrudge her the quilt for one reason; it has a piece of one of your old satin waistcoats in it.'

'Did she tell you that she had had those bedclothes ever since her marriage?'

'Yes; but I have always felt that she couldn't have been married very long.'

'How long should you think?'

'Oh, well——'

'And yet she certainly has the clearest possible idea of Mr. Walters. I imagine that very few women ever come to know their husbands as perfectly as Mrs. Walters knew hers.'

'Or perhaps wish to.'

The sagacious old soul.

III

SEVERAL earthquakes have lately been felt in this part of the globe. Coming events cast their shocks before.

The end of August—the night before my marriage.

The news of it certainly came like the shock of an earthquake to many people of the town, who know perfectly well that no woman will allow the fruit and flowers to be carried off a place as a man will. The sagacious old soul who visits me yearly for young pie-plant actually hurried out and begged for a basketful of the roots at once, thus taking time—and the rhubarb—by the forelock. And the old epicurean harpy whose passion is asparagus, having accosted me gruffly on the street with an inquiry as to the truth of my engagement and been quietly assured how true it was, informed me to my face that any man situated as happily as I am was an infernal fool

to entangle himself with a wife, and bade me a curt and everlasting good-morning on the spot. Yet every day the theme of this old troubadour's talk around the hotels is female entanglements—mendacious, unwifely, and for him unavailing.

Through divers channels some of my fellow-creatures—specimens of the most dreadful prose—have let me know that upon marrying I shall forfeit their usurious regard. As to them, I shall relapse into the privacy of an orchard that has been plucked of its fruit. But my wonderment has grown on the other hand at the number of those to whom, as the significant unit of a family instead of a bachelor zero, I have now acquired a sterling mercantile valuation. Upon the whole, I may fairly compute that my relation to the human race has been totally changed by the little I may cease to give away and by the less that I shall need to buy.

And Mrs. Walters! Although I prefer to think of Mrs. Walters as a singer, owing to her unaccountable powers of reminiscential vocalisation, I have upon occasion classified her among the waders; and certainly, upon the day when my engagement to Georgiana transpired, she waded not only around the town but all over it, sustained by a buoyancy of spirit that enabled her to keep her head above water in depths where her feet no longer touched the bottom.

It was the crowning triumph of this vacant soul's life to boast that she had made this match; and for the sake of giving her so much happiness, I think I should have been willing to marry Georgiana whether I loved her or not.

So we are all happy: Sylvia, who thus enters upon a family right to my flowers and to the distinction of being the only Miss Cobb; Dilsy, who, while gathering vegetables about the garden, long ago began to receive little bundles of quilt pieces thrown down to her with a smile and the right word from the window above; and Jack, who is to drive us on our bridal-trip to the Blue Lick Springs, where he hopes to renew his scientific studies upon the maxillary bones. I have hesitated between Blue Lick and Mud Lick, though to a man in my condition there can be no great difference between blue and mud. And I had thought of the Harrodsburg Springs, but the negro musicians there were lately hurried off to Canada by the underground railway, out of which fact has grown a lawsuit for damages between the proprietor and his abolitionist guest.

A few weeks ago I entrusted a secret to Georgiana. I told her that before she condescended to shine upon this part of the world—now the heavenlier part—I had been engaged upon certain researches and discoveries relating

to Kentucky birds, especially to the Kentucky warbler. I admitted that these studies had been wretchedly put aside under the more pressing necessity of fixing the attention of all my powers, ornithological and other, upon her garden window. But as I placed specimens of my notes and drawings in her hand, I remarked gravely that after our marriage I should be ready to push my work forward without delay.

All this was meant to give her a delightful surprise; and indeed she examined the evidences of my undertaking with devouring and triumphant eagerness. But what was my amazement when she handed them back in silence, and with a face as white, though as fragrant, as a rose.

'I have distressed you, Georgiana!' I cried, 'and my only thought had been to give you pleasure. I am always doing something wrong!'

She closed her eyes and passed her fingers searchingly across her brow, as we sometimes instinctively try to brush away our cares. Then she sat looking down rather pitifully at her palms, as they lay in her lap.

'You have shared your secret with me,' she said solemnly, at length. 'I'll share mine with you. It is the only fear that I have ever felt regarding our future. It has never left me; and what you have just shown me fills me with terror.'

I sat aghast.

Specimens of my notes and drawings.

'I am not deceived,' she continued; 'you have not forgotten nature. It draws you more powerfully than anything else in the world. Whenever you speak of it, you say the right thing, you find the right word, you get the right meaning. With nature alone you are perfectly natural. Towards society you show your shabby, awkward, trivial, uncomfortable side. But these drawings, these notes—there lies your power, your gift, your home. You truly belong to the woodsmen.'

I listened to this as to fresh talk about a stranger.

'Do you not foresee what will happen?' she went on, with emotion. 'After we have been married a while you will begin to wander off—at first for part of a day, then for a day, then for a day and a night, then for days and nights together. That was the way with Audubon, that was the way with Wilson, that is the way with Thoreau, that will be the way with all whom nature draws as it draws you. And me—think of me—at home! A woman not able to go with you! Not able to wade the creeks and swim the rivers! Not able to sleep out in the brown leaves, to endure the rain, the cold, the travel! And so I shall never be able to fill your life with mine as you fill mine with yours. As time passes, I shall fill it less and less. Every spring nature will be just as young to you; I shall be always older. The water you

love ripples, never wrinkles. I shall cease rippling and begin wrinkling. No matter what happens, each summer the birds get fresh feathers; only think how my old ones will never drop out. I shall want you to go on with your work. If I am to be your wife, I must be wings to you. But think of compelling me to furnish you the wings with which to leave me! What is a little book on Kentucky birds in comparison with my happiness!'

She was so deeply moved that my one desire was to uproot her fears on the spot.

'Then there shall be no little book on Kentucky birds!' I cried. 'I'll throw these things into the fire as soon as I go home. Only say what you wish me to be, Georgiana,' I continued, laughing, 'and I'll be it—if it's the town pump.'

'Then if I could only be the town well,' she said, with a poor little effort to make a heavy heart all at once go merrily again.

Bent on making it go merrily as long as I shall live, the following day I called out to her at the window:

'Georgiana, I'm improving. I'm getting along.'

'What do you mean?' she asked.

'Well, in town this morning they chose me as one of the judges of vegetables at the fair next month. I said, "Gentlemen, I expect to be married before that time, and I do not intend to be separated from my wife. Will she have the

privilege of accompanying me among these competing vegetables?" And last month they made me director of a turnpike company—I suppose because it runs through my farm. To-day at a meeting of the directors I said, "Gentlemen, how far is this turnpike to run? I will direct it to the end of my farm and not a step farther. I do not wish to be separated from my wife."'

Georgiana has teased me a good deal in my life. It is well to let a woman taste of the tree of knowledge whose fruit she is fond of dispensing.

'You'd better be careful!' she said archly. 'Remember, I haven't married you yet.'

'I *am* careful,' I replied. 'I haven't married *you* yet, either! My idea, Georgiana,' I continued, 'is to plant a grove and raise cocoons. That would gratify my love of nature and your fancy for silk dresses. I could have my silk woven and spun in our manufactory at Newport, Kentucky; and you know that we couldn't possibly lose each other among the mulberry-trees.'

'You'd better take care!' she repeated. 'Do you expect to talk to me in this style after we are married?'

'That will all depend upon how you talk to me,' I answered. 'But I have always understood married life to be the season when the worm begins to turn.'

Despite my levity, I have been secretly stricken with remorse at the monstrous selfishness that lay coiled like a canker in my words. I was really no better than those husbands who virtually say to their wives :

'While I was trying to win you, the work of my life was secondary — you were everything. Now that I have won you, it will be everything, and you must not stand in the way.'

But the thought is insupportable that Georgiana should not be happy with me at any cost. I divine now the reason of the effort she has long been making to win me from nature ; therefore of my own free will I have privately set about changing the character of my life with the idea of suiting it to some other work in which she too may be content. And thus it has come about that during the August now ended — always the month of the year in which my nature will go its solitary way and seek its woodland peace — I have hung about the town as one who is offered for hire to a master whom he has never seen and for a work that he hates to do. Many of the affairs that engage the passions of my fellow-beings are to me as the gray stubble through which I walk in the September fields — the rotting wastage of harvests long since gathered in. At other times I drive myself upon their sharp and piercing conflicts as a bird is blown uselessly again and

again by some too strong a wind upon the spikes of the thorn. I hear the angry talk of our farmers and merchants, I listen to the fiery orations of our statesmen and the warning sermons of our divines. (Think of a human creature calling himself a divine.) The troubled ebb and flow of events in Kentucky, the larger movements of unrest throughout the great republic—these have replaced for me the old communings with nature that were full of music and of peace.

Evening after evening now I turn my conversations with Georgiana as gaily as I can upon some topic of the time. She is not always pleased with what I style my researches into civilised society. One evening in particular our talk was long and serious, beginning in shallows and then steering for deep waters.

'Well, Georgiana,' I had said, 'Miss Delia Webster has suddenly returned to her home in Vermont.'

'And who is Miss Delia Webster?' she had inquired, with unmistakable acidity.

'Miss Delia Webster is the lady who was sentenced to the State penitentiary for abducting our silly old servants into Ohio. But the jury of Kentucky noblemen who returned the verdict—being married men, and long used to forgiving a woman anything—petitioned the governor to

pardon Miss Delia on the ground that she belongs to the sex that can do no wrong—and be punished for it. Whereupon the governor, seasoned to the like large experience, pardoned the lady. Whereupon Miss Webster, having passed a few weeks in the penitentiary, left, as I stated, for her home in Vermont, followed by her father, who does not, however, seem to have been able to overtake her.'

'If she'd been a man, now,' suggested Georgiana.

'If she'd been a man she would have shared the fortunes of her principal, the Reverend Mr. Fairbanks, who has *not* returned to his home in Ohio, and will not—for fifteen years.'

'Do you think it an agreeable subject of conversation?' inquired Georgiana.

'Then I will change it,' I said. 'The other day the editor of the Smithland *Bee* was walking along the street with his little daughter and was shot down by a doctor.'

'Horrible!' exclaimed Georgiana. 'Why?'

'Self-defence,' I answered. 'And last week in the court-room in Mount Sterling a man was shot by his brother-in-law during the sitting of court.'

'And why did *he* kill *him?*'

'Self-defence!' I answered. 'And in Versailles a man down in the street was assassinated with a rifle fired from the garret of a tavern. Self-

defence. And in Lexington a young man shot and killed another for drawing his handkerchief from his pocket. Self-defence!—the sense of the court being that whatever such an action might mean in other civilised countries, in Kentucky and under the circumstances—the young fellows were quarrelling—it naturally betokened the reaching for a revolver. Thus in Kentucky, Georgiana, and during a heated discussion, a man cannot blow his nose but at the risk of his life.'

'I'll see that you never carry a handkerchief,' said Georgiana. 'So remember—don't you ever reach for one!'

'And the other day in Eddysville,' I went on, 'two men fought a duel by going to a doctor's shop and having him open a vein in the arm of each. Just before they fainted from exhaustion they made signs that their honour was satisfied, so the doctor tied up the veins. I see that you don't believe it, but it's true.'

'And why did they fight a duel in that way?'

'I give it up,' I said, 'unless it was in self-defence. We are a most remarkable society of self-defenders. But if every man who fights in Kentucky is merely engaged in warding off a murderous attack upon his life, who does all the murderous attacking? You know the seal of our commonwealth: two gentlemen in evening dress shaking hands and with one voice declaring,

"United we stand, divided we fall." So far as the temper of our time goes, these two gentlemen might well be represented as twenty paces apart, and as calling out, "United, we stood; divided, *you* fall!" Killings and duels! Killings and duels! Do you think we need these as proofs of courage? Do you suppose that the Kentuckians of our day are braver than the pioneers? Do you suppose that any people ever elevated its ideal of courage in the eyes of the world by all the homicides and all the duels that it could count? There is only one way in which any civilised people has ever done that, only one way in which any civilised people has ever been able to impress the world very deeply with a belief in the reality and the nobility of its ideal of courage: it is by the warlike spirit of its men in times of war, and by the peaceful spirit of its men in times of peace. Only, you must add this: that when these times of peace have come on, and it is no longer possible for such a people to realise its ideal of courage in arms, it is nevertheless driven to express the ideal in other ways—by monuments, arches, inscriptions, statues, literature, pictures, all in honour of those of their countrymen who lived the ideal before the world and left it more lustrous in their dying. That is the full reason why we know how brave a people the Greeks were—by their peaceful ways of honouring valour in times of peace. And that in

part is why no nation in the world doubts the courage of the English, because when the English are not fighting they are for ever doing something to honour those who have fought well. So that they never have a peace but they turn it into preparation for the next war.

'And that is why, as the outside world looks in upon us to-day and sifts the evidence of whether or not we are a brave people, it does not find proof of this in our homicides and duels, but in the spirit of our forefathers of the Revolution, in the soldiers of the wilderness and of Indian warfare, of the war of 1812, of the war with Mexico, at Cerro Gordo, at Buena Vista, at Palo Alto, at Resaca de la Palma. Wherever the Kentuckians have fought as soldiers, many or few, on whatever battle-field, in whatsoever cause, there you may see whether they know what it is to be men, and whether they have an ideal of courage that is worth the name.

'Then a few years ago in Frankfort twenty thousand people followed to the grave the bodies of the men who had fallen in Mexico. The State has raised a monument to them, to the soldiers of 1812, to those who fought at the river Raisin. The Legislature has ordered a medal to be struck in honour of a boy who had defended his ensign. No man can make a public speech in Kentucky without mention of Encancion and Monterey, or

of the long line of battles in which every generation of our people has fought. This is the other proof that in times of peace we do not forget. It is not much, but it is of the right kind—it is the soldier's monument, it is the soldier's medal, it is the soldier's funeral oration, it is the recognition by the people of its ideal of courage in times of peace. And with every other brave people this proof passes as the sign universal. But our homicides and our duels, nearly all of them brought about in the name—even under the fear—of courage, what effect have they had in giving us abroad our reputation as a community? I ask myself the question, what if all the men who have killed their personal enemies or been killed by them in Kentucky, and if all the men who have killed their personal friends or been killed by them in Kentucky, had spent their love of fighting and their love of courage upon a monument to the Pioneers—such a monument as stands nowhere else in the world, and might fitly stand in this State to commemorate the winning of the West? Would the world think the better or the worse of the Kentucky ideal of bravery?

'I had not meant to talk to you so long on this subject,' I added, in apology, 'but I have been thinking of these things lately since I have been so much in town.'

'I am interested,' said Georgiana; 'and as I

agree with you, we need not both speak.' But she looked pained, and I sought to give a happier turn to the conversation.

'There is only one duel I ever heard of that gave me any pleasure, and that one never came off. A few years ago a Kentuckian wrote a political satire on an Irishman in Illinois—wrote it as a widow. The Irishman wished to fight. The widow offered to marry the Irishman, if such a sacrifice would be accepted as satisfactory damages. The Irishman sent a challenge, and the Kentuckian chose cavalry broadswords of the largest size. He was a giant; he had the longest arms of any man in Illinois: he could have mowed Erin down at a stroke like a green milk-weed; he had been trained in duelling with oak-trees. You never heard of him: his name is Abraham Lincoln.'

'I have heard of him, and I have seen him —in Union County before I came here,' said Georgiana, with enthusiasm.

'He came here once to hear Mr. Clay speak,' I resumed; 'and I saw them walking together one day under the trees at Ashland—the two most remarkable-looking men that I ever beheld together.'

My few acres touch the many of the great statesman. Georgiana and I often hear of the movements of his life, as two little boats in a quiet bay are tossed by the storms of the ocean. Any

reference to him always makes us thoughtful, and we fell silent now.

'Georgiana,' I said at length, softly, 'it's all in self-defence. I believe you promised to marry me in self-defence.'

'I did,' she said promptly.

'Well, I certainly asked *you* in self-defence, Miss Cobb,' I replied. 'And now in a few days, according to the usage of my time, I am going to take your life—even at the peril of my own. If you desire, it is your privilege to examine the deadly weapons before the hour of actual combat,' and I held out my arms to her appealingly.

She bent her body delicately aside, as always.

'I am upset,' she said discouragingly. 'You have been abusing Kentucky.'

'Ah, that is the trouble!' I answered. 'You wish me to become more interested in my fellow-creatures. And then you will not let me speak of what they do. And the other day you told me that I am not perfectly natural with anything but nature. Nature is the only thing that is perfectly natural with me. When I study nature there are no delicate or dangerous or forbidden subjects. The trees have no evasions. The weeds are honest. Running water is not trying to escape. The sunsets are not coloured with hypocrisy. The lightning is not revenge. Everything stands forth in the sincerity of its being, and nature invites me to

exercise the absolute liberty of my mind upon all life. I am bidden to master and proclaim whatsoever truth she has fitted me to grasp. If I am worthy to investigate, none is offended ; if I should be wise enough to discover any law of nature, the entire world would express its thanks. Imagine my being assassinated because I had published a complete report upon the life and habits of the field-mouse ! '

' If one mouse published a report on the life and habits of another, there'd be a fight all over the field,' said Georgiana.

' A ridiculous extreme,' I replied. ' But after you have grown used to study nature with absolute freedom and absolute peace, think how human life repels you. You may not investigate, you may not speak out, you may not even think, you may not even feel. You are not allowed to reveal what is concealed, and you are required to conceal what is revealed. Natural ! Have you ever known any two men to be perfectly natural with each other except when they were fighting ? As for the men that I associate with every day, they weigh their words out to one another as the apothecary weighs his poisons, or the grocer his gunpowder.'

' You forget,' said Georgiana, ' that we are living in a very extraordinary time, when everybody is sensitive and excited.'

'It is so always and everywhere,' I replied. 'You may never study life as you study nature. With men you must take your choice: liberty for your mind and a prison for your body; liberty for your body and a prison for your mind. Nearly all people choose the latter; we know what becomes of the few who do not.'

But this reference to the times led us to speak slowly and solemnly of what all men now are speaking: war that must come between the North and the South. We agreed that it would come from each side as a blazing torch to Kentucky, which lies between the two, and is divided between the two in love and hate—to Kentucky, where a soldier's life is always the ideal of a man's duty and glory.

At last I felt that my time had come.

'Georgiana,' I said, 'there is one secret I have never shared with you. It is the only fear I have ever felt regarding our future. But, if there should be a war—you'd better know it now—leave you or not leave you, I am going to join the army.'

She grew white and faint with the thought of a day to come. But at last she said:

'Yes; you must go.'

'I know one thing,' I added, after a long silence; 'if I could do my whole duty as a Kentuckian—as an American citizen—as a human being—I should have to fight on both sides.'

I have thus set down in a poor way a part of the only talk I ever had with Georgiana on these subjects during the year 1851.

Yesterday, about sunset, the earth and sky were beautiful with that fulness of peace which things often attain at the moment before they alter and end. The hour seemed to me the last serene loveliness of summer, soon to be ruffled by gales and blackened by frosts.

Georgiana stood at her window looking into the west. The shadows of the trees in my yard fell longer and longer across the garden towards her. Darkest among these lay the shapes of the cedars and the pines in which the red-bird had lived. Her whole attitude bespoke a mood surrendered to memory; and I felt sure that we two were thinking of the same thing.

As she approached that mystical revelation of life which must come with our marriage, Georgiana's gaiety has grown subtly overcast. It is as if the wild strain in her were a little sad at having to be captured at last; and I too experience an indefinable pain that it has become my lot to subdue her in this way. The thought possesses me that she submits to marriage because she cannot live intimately with me and lavish her love upon me in any other relation; and therefore I draw

back with awe from the idea of taking such possession of her as I will and must.

As she stood at her window yesterday evening she caught sight of me across the yard and silently beckoned. I went over and looked up at her, waiting and smiling.

'Well, what is it?' I asked at length, as her eyes rested on me with the fulness of affection.

'Nothing. I wanted to see you standing down there once more. Haven't you thought of it? This is the last time—the last of the window, the last of the garden, the end of the past. Everything after this will be so different. Aren't you a little sorry that you are going to marry me?'

'Will you allow me to fetch the minister this instant?'

In the evening they put on her bridal dress and sent over for me, and, drawing the parlour doors aside, blinded me with the sight of her standing in there, as if waiting in duty for love to claim its own. As I saw her then I have but to close my eyes to see her now. I scarce know why, but that vision of her haunts my mind mysteriously.

I see a fresh snow-drift in a secret green valley between dark mountains. The sun must travel far and high to reach it; but when it does, its rays pour down from near the zenith and are most powerful and warm; then in a little while the

whole valley is green again and a white mist, rising from it, muffles the face of the sun.

Oh, Georgiana! Georgiana! Do not fade away from me as I draw you to me.

My last solitary candle flickers in the socket: it is in truth the end of the past.

IV

AST summer I felled a dead oak in the woods and had the heart of him stored away for my winter fuel: a series of burnt-offerings to the worshipful spirit of my hearth-stone. There should have been several of these offerings already, for October is almost ended now, and it is the month during which the first cool nights come on in Kentucky and the first fires are lighted.

A few twilights ago I stood at my yard gate watching the red domes of the forest fade into shadow and listening to the cawing of crows under the low gray of the sky as they hurried home. A chill crept over the earth. It was a fitting hour; I turned in-doors and summoned Georgiana.

'We will light our first fire together,' I said, straining her to my heart.

Kneeling gaily down, we piled the wood in the deep, wide chimney. Each of us then brought a live coal, and together we started the blaze. I had drawn Georgiana's chair to one side of the fireplace, mine opposite ; and with the candle still unlit we now sat silently watching the flame spread. What need was there of speech? We understood.

By-and-by some broken wreaths of smoke floated outward into the room. My sense caught the fragrance. I sniffed it with a rush of memories. Always that smell of smoke, with other wild, clean, pungent odours of the woods, had been strangely pleasant to me. I remember thinking of them when a boy as incense perpetually and reverently set free by nature towards the temple of the skies. They aroused in me even then the spirit of meditation on the mystery of the world ; and later they became inwrought with the pursuit and enjoyment of things that had been the delight of my life for many years. So that coming now, at the very moment when I was dedicating myself to my

hearth-stone and to domestic life, this smell of wood smoke reached me like a message from my past. For an instant ungovernable longing surged over me to return to it. For an instant I did return; and once more I lay drowsing before my old camp-fires in the autumn woods, with the frosted trees draping their crimson curtains around me on the walls of space and the stars flashing thick in the ceiling of my bed-chamber.

My dog, who had stretched himself at my feet before the young blaze, inhaled the smoke also with a full breath of reminiscence, and lay watching me out of the corner of his eye—I fancied with reproachful constancy. I caught his look with a sense of guilt, and glanced across at Georgiana.

Her gaze was buried deep in the flames. And how sweet her face was, how inexpressibly at peace. She had folded the wings of her whole life, and sat by the hearth as still as a brooding dove. No past laid its disturbing touch upon her shoulder. Instead, I could see that if there were any flight of her mind away from the present it was into the future—a slow, tranquil flight across the years, with all the happiness that they must bring. As I set my own thoughts to journey after hers, suddenly the scene in the room changed, and I beheld Georgiana as an old, old lady, with locks of silver on her temples, spectacles, a tiny sock

I beheld Georgiana as an old, old lady.

stuck through with needles on her knee, and her face finely wrinkled, but still blooming with unconquerable gaiety and youth.

'How sweet that smoke is, Georgiana,' I said, rousing us both, and feeling sure that she will understand me in whatsoever figure I may speak. 'And how much we are wasting when we change this old oak back into his elements—smoke and light, heat and ashes. What a magnificent work he was on natural history, requiring hundreds of years for his preparation and completion, written in a language so learned that not the wisest can read him wisely, and enduringly bound in the finest of tree calf! It is a dishonour to speak of him as a work. He was a doctor of philosophy! He should have been a college professor! Think how he could have used his own feet for a series of lectures on the laws of equilibrium, capillary attraction, or soils and moisture! Was there ever a head that knew as much as his about the action of light? Did any human being ever more grandly bear the burdens of life or better face the tempests of the world? What did he not know about birds? He had carried them in his arms and nurtured them in his bosom for a thousand years. Even his old coat, with all its rents and patches—what roll of papyrus was ever so crowded with the secrets of knowledge? The august antiquarian! The old king! Can you imagine

a funeral urn too noble for his ashes? But to what base uses, Georgiana! He will not keep the wind away any longer; we shall change him into a kettle of lye with which to whiten our floors.'

What Georgiana's reply could have been I do not know, for at that moment Mrs. Walters flitted in.

'I saw through the windows that you had a fire,' she said volubly, 'and ran over to get warm. And, oh yes, I wanted to tell you——'

'Stop, *please*, Mrs. Walters!' I cried, starting towards her with an outstretched hand and a warning laugh. 'You have not yet been formally introduced to this room, and a formal introduction is necessary. You must be made acquainted with a primary law of its being'; and as Mrs. Walters paused, dropping her hands into her lap and regarding me with an air of mystification, I went on:

'When I had repairs made in my house last summer, I had this fireplace rebuilt, and I ordered an inscription to be burnt into the bricks. We expect to ask that all our guests will kindly notice this inscription in order to avoid accidents or misunderstandings. So I beg of you not to speak until you have read the words over the fireplace.'

Mrs. Walters wonderingly read the following legend, running in an arch across the chimney:

Good friend, around these hearth-stones speak no evil word of any creature.

She wheeled towards me with instantaneous triumph.

'I'm glad you put it there!' she cried. 'I'm glad you put it there! It will teach them a lesson about their talking. If there is one thing I *cannot* stand it is a gossip.'

I have observed that a fowl before a looking-glass will fight its own image.

'Take care, Mrs. Walters!' I said gently. 'You came very near to violating the law just then.'

'He meant it for me, Mrs. Walters,' said Georgiana, fondling our neighbour's hand, and looking at me with an awful rebuke.

'I meant it for myself,' I said. 'And now it is doing its best to make me feel like a Pharisee. So I hasten to add that there are other rooms in the house in which it will be allowed human nature to assert itself in this long-established, hereditary, and ineradicable right. Our guests have only to intimate that they can no longer restrain their propensities and we will conduct them to another chamber. Mrs. Moss and I will occasionally make use of these chambers ourselves, to relieve the tension of too much virtue. But it is seriously our idea to have one room in the house where we shall feel safe, both as respects ourselves and as respects others, from the discomfort of evil speaking. As long as these walls stand or we dwell in

them, this is to be the room of charity and kindness to all creatures.'

Although we exerted ourselves, conversation

Dropped into a cough.

flagged during the visit of Mrs. Walters. Several times she began to speak, but, with a frightened look at the fireplace, dropped into a cough, or

cleared her throat in a way that called to mind the pleasing habit of Sir Roger de Coverley in the Gardens of Gray's Inn.

Later in the evening other guests came. Upon each the law of that fireside was lightly yet gravely impressed. They were in the main the few friends I know in whom such an outward check would call for the least inner restraint; nevertheless, on what a footing of confidence it placed our conversation! To what a commanding level we were safely lifted! For nothing so releases the best powers of the mind as the understanding that the entire company are under bond to keep the peace of the finest manners and of perfect breeding.

And Georgiana—how she shone! I knew that she could perfectly fill a window; I now see that she can as easily fill a room. Our bodies were grouped about the fireplace; our minds centred around her, and she flashed like the evening star along our intellectual pathway.

The next day Mrs. Walters talked a long time to Georgiana on the edge of the porch.

Thus my wife and I have begun life together. I think that most of our evenings will be spent in the room dedicated to a kind word for universal life. No matter how closely the warring forces of existence, within or without, have pressed upon us elsewhere, when we enter there we enter peace. We shall be walled in from all darkness of what-

soever meaning ; our better selves will be the sole guests of those luminous hours. And surely no greater good-fortune can befall any household than to escape an ignoble evening. To attain a noble one is like lying calmly down to sleep on a mountain-top towards which our feet have struggled upward amid enemies all day long.

Although we have now been two months married, I have not yet captured the old uncapturable loveliness of nature which has always led me and still leads me on in the person of Georgiana. I know but too well now that I never shall. The charm in her which I pursue, yet never overtake, is part and parcel of that ungraspable beauty of the world which for ever foils the sense while it sways the spirit—of that elusive, infinite splendour of God which flows from afar into all terrestrial things, filling them as colour fills the rose. Even while I live with Georgiana in the closest of human relationships, she retains for me the uncomprehended brightness and freshness of a dream that does not end and has no waking.

This but edges yet more sharply the eagerness of my desire to enfold her entire self into mine. We have been a revelation to each other, but the revelation is not complete ; there are curtains behind curtains, which one by one we seek to lift as we penetrate more deeply into the discoveries of our union. Sometimes she will seek me out,

and, sitting beside me, put her arm around my neck and look long into my eyes, full of a sort of beautiful, divine wonder at what I am, at what love is, at what it means for a man and woman to live together as we live. Yet, folded to me thus, she also craves a still larger fulfilment. Often she appears to be vainly hovering on the other side of a too solid sphere, seeking an entrance to where I really am. Even during the intimate silences of the night we try to reach one another through the throbbing walls of flesh—we but cling together across the lone, impassable gulfs of individual being.

During these October nights the moon has reached its fulness and the earth been flooded with beauty.

Our bed is placed near a window ; and as the planet sinks across the sky its rays stream through the open shutter and fall upon Georgiana in her sleep. Sometimes I lie awake for the sole chance of seeing them float upon her hair, pass lingeringly across her face, and steal holily downward along her figure. How august she is in her purity ! the whiteness of the fairest cloud that brushes the silvering orb is as pitch to the whiteness of her nature.

The other night as I lay watching her thus, and while the lower part of the bed remained in deep shadow, I could see that the thin covering had slipped aside, leaving Georgiana's feet exposed.

With a start of pain I recollected an old story about her childhood: that one day for the sake of her rights she had received a wound in one of her feet—how serious I had never known, but perhaps deforming, irremediable. My head was raised on the pillow; the moonlight was moving down that way; it would cross her feet; it would reveal the truth.

I turned my face away and closed my eyes.

V

IT is nearly dark when I reach home from town these January evenings. However the cold may sting the face and dart inward to the marrow, Georgiana is waiting at the yard gate to meet me, so hooded and shawled and ringed about with petticoats — like a tree within its layers of bark — that she looks like the most thick-set of ordinary-sized women; for there is a heavenly but very human secret hiding in this household now, and she is thoughtfully keeping it.

We press our half-frozen cheeks together, as red as wine-sap apples, and grope for each other's hand through our big lamb's-wool mittens, and warm our hearts with the laughter in each other's eyes. One evening she feigned to be mounted on guard, pacing to and fro inside the gate, against which rested an enormous icicle. When I started to enter she seized the icicle, presented arms, and demanded the countersign.

'Love, captain,' I said. 'If it be not that, slay me at your feet!'

She threw away her great white spear and put her arms around my neck.

'It is "Peace,"' she said. 'But I desert to the enemy.'

Without going to my fireside that evening I hurried on to the stable; for I do not relinquish to my servants the office of feeding my stock.

Believe in the divine rights of kings I never shall, except in the divine right to be kingly men, which all men share; but truly a divine right lies for any man in the ownership of a comfortable barn in winter. It is the feudal castle of the farm to the lower animals, who dwell in the Dark Ages of their kind—dwell on and on in affection, submission, and trust, while their lord demands of them their labour, their sustenance, their life.

Of a winter's day, when these poor serfs have been scattered over the portionless earth, how often

they look towards this fortress and lift up their voices with cries for night to come ; the horses, ruffled and shivering, with their tails to the wind, as they snap their frosted fodder, or paw through the rime to the frozen grass underneath, causing their icy fetlocks to rattle about their hoofs ; the cattle, crowded to leeward of some deep-buried haystack, the exposed side of the outermost of them white with whirling flakes ; the sheep, turning their pitiful, trusting eyes about them over the fields of storm in earth and sky.

What joy at nightfall to gather them home to food and warmth and rest ! If there is ever a time when I feel myself a mediæval lord to trusty vassals, it is then. Of a truth I pass entirely over the Middle Ages, joining my life to the most ancient dwellers of the plains, and becoming a simple father of flocks and herds. When they have been duly stabled according to their kinds, I climb to the crib in the barn and create a great landslide of the fat ears that is like laughter ; and then from every stall what a hearty, healthy chorus of cries and petitions responds to that laughter of the corn ! What squeals and grunts persuasive beyond the realms of rhetoric ! What a blowing of mellow horns from the cows ! And the quick nostril trumpet-call of the horse, how eager, how dependent, yet how commanding ? As I mount to the top of the pile, if I ever feel myself a royal

personage it is then ; I ascend my throne ; I am king of the corn ; and there is not a brute or peasant in my domain that does not worship me as a ruler of heaven and earth.

Or I love to catch up the bundles of oats as they are thrown down from the loft and send them whirling through the cutting-box so fast that they pour into the big baskets like streams of melted gold ; or, grasping my pitchfork, I stuff the ricks over the mangers with the rich aromatic hay until I am as warm as when I loaded the waggons with it at midsummer noons.

With what sweet sounds and odours now the whole barn is filled ! How robust, clean, well-meaning are my thoughts ! In what comfort of mind I can turn to my own roof and store !

This hour in my stable is the only one out of the twenty-four left to me in which my feet may cross the boundary of human life into the world of the other creatures ; for I have gone into business in town to gratify Georgiana. I think little enough of this business otherwise. Every day I pass through the groove of it with no more intellectual satisfaction in it than I feel an intellectual satisfaction in passing my legs through my pantaloons of a morning. But a man can study nothing in nature that does not outreach his powers.

If time is left after feeding I veer off from the barn to the wood-pile, for I love to wield an axe,

besides having a taste to cut my own wood for the nightly burning. This evening I could but stop to notice how the turkeys in the tree-tops looked like enormous black nutgalls on the limbs, except that the wind whisked their tails about as cheerily as though they were already hearth-brooms.

It is well for my poor turkeys that their tails contain no moisture ; for on a night like this they would freeze stiff, and the least incautious movement of a fowl in the morning would serve to crack its tail off—up to the pope's nose.

As I set my foot on the door-step, I went back to see whether the two snow-birds were in their nightly places under the roof of the porch—the guardian spirits of our portal. There they were, wedged each into a snug corner as tightly as possible, so not to break their feathers, and leaving but one side exposed. Happening to have some wheat in my pocket, I pitched the grains up to the projecting ledge ; they can take their breakfast in bed when they wake in the morning. Little philosophers of the frost, who even in their overcoats combine the dark side and the white side of life into a wise and weathering gray—the no less fit external for a man.

The thought of them to-night put me strongly in mind of a former habit of mine to walk under the cedar-trees at such dark winter twilights and listen to the low calls of the birds as they gathered

in and settled down. I have no time for such pleasant ways now; they have been given up along with my other studies.

This winter of 1851 and 1852 has been cold beyond the memory of man in Kentucky—the memory of the white man, which goes back some three-quarters of a century. Twice the Ohio River has been frozen over, a sight he had never seen. The thermometer has fallen to thirty degrees below zero. Unheard-of snows have blocked the two or three railroads we have in the State. News comes that people are walking over the ice on East River, New York, and that the Mississippi at Memphis bears the weight of a man a hundred yards from the bank.

Behind this winter lay last year's spring of rigours hitherto unknown, destroying orchards, vineyards, countless tender trees and plants. It set everybody to talking of the year 1834, when such a frost fell that to this day it is known as Black Friday in Kentucky; and it gave me occasion to tell Georgiana a story my grandfather had told me, of how one night in the wilderness the weather grew so terrible that the wild beasts came out of the forests to shelter themselves around the cabins of the pioneers, and how he was awakened by them fighting and crowding for places against the warm walls and chimney-corners. If he had but opened his door and crept back into

bed, he might soon have had a buffalo on one side of his fireplace and a bear on the other, with a wild-cat asleep on the hearth between, and with the thin-skinned deer left shivering outside as truly as if they had all been human beings.

Such a spring, with its destruction of seed-bearing and nut-bearing vegetation, followed by a winter that seals under ice what may have been produced, has spread starvation among the wild creatures. A recent Sunday afternoon walk in the woods—Georgiana being away from home with her mother—showed me that part of the earth's surface rolled out as a vast white chart, on which were traced the desperate travels of the snow-walkers in search of food. Squirrel, chipmunk, rabbit, weasel, mouse, mink, fox—their tracks crossed and recrossed, wound in and out and round and round, making an intricate lace-work beautiful and pitiful to behold. Crow-prints ringed every corn-shuck in the field. At the base of one I picked up a frozen dove—starved at the brink of plenty. Rabbit tracks grew thickest as I entered my turnip and cabbage patches, converging towards my house, and coming to a focus at a group of snow-covered pyramids, in which last autumn, as usual, I buried my vegetables. I told Georgiana :

'They are attracted by the leaves that Dilsy throws away when she gets out what we need.

Think of it—a whole neighbourhood of rabbits hurrying here after dark for the chance of a bare nibble at a possible leaf.' Once that night I turned in bed, restless. Georgiana did the same.

'Are you awake?' she said softly.

'Are you?'

'Are you thinking about the rabbits?'

'Are you?'

'What do you suppose they think about us?'

'I'd rather not know.'

Georgiana tells me that the birds in unusual numbers are wintering among the trees, driven to us with the boldness of despair. God and nature have forgotten them; they have nothing to choose between but death and man. She has taken my place as their almoner, and nightly renders me an account of what she has done. This winter gives her a great chance and she adorns it. It seems that never before were so many red-birds in the cedars; and although one subject is never mentioned between us, unconsciously she dwells upon these in her talk, and plainly favours them in her affection for the sake of the past. There are many stories I could relate to show how simple and beautiful is this whole aspect of her nature.

A little thing happened to-night.

Towards ten o'clock she brought my hat, overcoat, overshoes, mittens, comforter.

'Put them on,' she said mysteriously.

She also got ready, separating herself from me by so many clothes that I could almost have felt myself entitled to a divorce.

It was like day out-of-doors with the moon shining on the snow. We crept towards the garden, screened behind out-buildings. When we reached the fence, we looked through towards the white pyramids. All that part of the ground was alive with rabbits. Georgiana had spread for them a banquet of Lucullus, a Belshazzar's feast. It had been done to please me, I knew, and out of a certain playfulness of her own; but there are other charities of hers, which she thinks known only to herself, that show as well the divine drift of her thoughtfulness.

She is asleep now—for the sake of the Secret. After she had gone to bed, what with the spectacle of the rabbits and what with our talk beforehand of the many cardinals in the cedars, my thoughts began to run freshly on old subjects, and, unlocking my bureau, I got out my notes and drawings for the work on Kentucky birds. Georgiana does not know that they exist; she never shall. With what authority those studies call me still, as with a trumpet from the skies! and I know that trumpet will sound on till my ears are past

hearing. Sometimes I look upon myself as a man who has had two hearts; one lies buried in the woods, and the other sits at the fireside thinking of it. But sleep on, Georgiana—mother that is to be. The dreams of your life shall never be disturbed by the old dreams of mine.

VI

THE population of this town on yesterday was seven thousand nine hundred and twenty; to-day it is seven thousand nine hundred and twenty-*one*. The inhabitants of the globe are enriched by the same stupendous unit; the solar system must adjust itself to new laws of equilibrium; the choir of angels is sweetened by the advent of another musician. During the night Georgiana bore a son —not during the night, but at dawn, amid such singing of birds that every tree in the yard became a dew-hung belfry of chimes, ringing a welcome to the heir of this old house and of these old trees—to the dispenser of seed during winters

to come—to the proprietor of a whole race of seed-scatterers as long as nature shall be harsh and seasons shall return.

I had already bought the largest family Bible in town as a repository for his name, Adam Cobb Moss, which in clear euphony is most fit to be enrolled among the sweetly sounding vocables of the Hebrew children. The page for the registration of later births in my family is so large, and the lines ruled across it are so many, that I am deeply mortified over this solitary entry at the top. But surely Georgiana and I would have to live far past the ages of Abraham and Sarah to fill it with the requisite wealth of offspring, beginning as we do, and beginning without divine assistance. When the name of our eldest born is inscribed in this Bible, not far away will be found a scene in the home of his first parents, Georgiana and I being only the last of these, and giving, as it were, merely the finishing Kentucky touch to his Jewish origin.

But I gambol in spirit like a hawk in the air. Let me hood myself with parental cares ; I have been a sire for half a day.

I am speechless before the stupendous wisdom of my son in view of his stupendous ignorance. Already he lectures to the old people about the house on the perfect conduct of life, and the only

preparation that he requires for his lectures is a few drops of milk. By means of these, and without any knowledge of anatomy, he will show us, for instance, what it is to be master of the science of vital functions. When he regards it necessary to do anything, he does it instantly and perfectly, and the world may take the consequences and the result. He forthwith addresses himself to fresh comfort and new enterprises for self-development. Beyond what is vital he refuses to go ; things that do not concern him he lets alone. He has no cares beyond his needs ; all space to him is what he can fill, all time his instant of action. He does not know where he came from, what he is, why here, whither bound ; nor does he ask.

My heart aches helplessly for him when he shall have become a man and have grown less wise : when he shall find it necessary to act for himself, and shall yet be troubled by what his companions may think ; when he shall no longer live within the fortress of the vital, but take up his wandering abode with the husks and swine ; when he shall no longer let the world pass by him with heed only as there is need, but weary himself to better the unchangeable ; when space shall not be some quiet nook of the world large enough for the cradle of his life, but the illimitable void filled with floating spheres, out upon the myriads of which, with his poor, puzzled

eyes, he will pitifully gaze; when time shall not be his instant of action, but two eternities, past and future, along the baffling walls of which he will lead his groping faith; and when the questioning of his stoutest years shall be: Whence came I? And what am I? Why here for a little while? Where to be hereafter? A swimmer is drowned by a wave originating in the moon; a traveller is struck down by a bolt originating in a cloud; a workman is overcome by the heat originating in the sun; and so, perhaps, the end will come to him through his solitary struggle with the great powers of the universe that perpetually reach him, but remain for ever beyond his reach. If I could put forth one protecting prayer that would cover all his years, it would be that through life he continue as wise as the day he was born.

The third of June once more. Rain fell all yesterday, all last night. This morning earth and sky are dark and chill. The plants are bowed down, and no wind releases them from their burden of large white drops. About the yard the red-rose bushes fall away from the fences, the lilacs stand with their purple clusters hanging down as heavily as clusters of purple grapes. I hear the young orioles calling drearily from wet nests under dripping boughs. A plaintive piping of lost little chickens comes from the long grass.

How unlike the day is to the third of June two years ago! I was in the strawberry bed that crystalline morning; Georgiana came to the window, and I beheld her for the first time. How unlike the same day one year back. Again I was in the strawberry bed, again Georgiana came to the window and spoke to me as before. This morning as I tipped into her room where she lay in her bed, she turned her face to me on the pillow, and for the third time she said, fondly:

'Are you the gardener?'

The sky being so blanketed with cloud, although the shutters were open, only a faint gray light filled the room. It was the first day that she had been well enough to have it done; but now the bed in which Georgiana lay was spread with the most beautiful draperies of white; the pillows were rich with needle-work and lace, and for the first time she had put on the badge of her new dignity, a little white cap of ribbons and lace, the long wide streamers of which, edged with lace, lay out upon the counterpane like bands of the most delicate frost. The fingers of one hand rested lightly on the child beside her, as though she were counting the pulse of its oncoming life. Out in the yard the lilies of the valley, slipping out of their cool sheaths of green leaves, were not more white, more fresh. And surely Georgiana's gaiety is the unconquerable

gaiety of the world, the youthfulness of immortal youth.

I went over to her with the strange new awe I feel at my union with the young mother, where hitherto there has but been a union with the woman I love. She stretched out her hands to me, almost hidden under the lace of her sleeves, and drew my face down against hers, as she said in my ear :

'*Now* you are the old Adam !'

When she released me, she bent over the child and added, reproachfully :

'You haven't paid the least attention to the baby.'

'I haven't noticed that the baby has bestowed the least attention upon me. He is the youngest.'

'He is the guest of the house ! It is your duty to speak to him first.'

'He doesn't act like a guest in my house. He behaves as though he owned it. I'm nobody since he arrived—not even his body-servant.'

Georgiana, who was still bending over the child, glanced up with a look of confidential, whimsical distress.

'How *could* anything so old be born so young !'

'He will look younger as he gets older,' I replied. 'And he will not be the first bachelor to do that. At present this youngster is an invaluable human document in too large an envelope : that's all.'

Georgiana, with a swift, protecting movement, leaned nearer to the child, and spoke to him :

'It's your house ; tell him to leave the room for his impertinence.'

'He may have the house, since it's his,' I replied. 'But there is one thing I'll not stand ; if he ever comes between me and you, he'll have to go ; I'll present him to Mrs. Walters.'

I was not aware of the expression with which I stood looking down upon my son, but Georgiana must have noticed it.

'And what if he supplants me some day?' she asked, suddenly serious, and with an old fear reviving.

'Oh, Georgiana!' I cried, kneeling by the bedside and putting my arms around her, 'you know that as long as we are in this world I am your lover.'

'No longer?' she whispered, drawing me closer.

'For ever!'

By-and-by I went out to the strawberry bed. The season was too backward. Not one was turning. With bitter disappointment I searched the cold, wet leaves, bending them apart for the sight of as much as one scarlet lobe, that I might take it in to her if only for remembrance of the day. At last I gathered a few perfect leaves and blossoms, and presented them to her in silence on a plate with a waiter and napkin.

She rewarded me with a laugh, and lifted from the plate a spray of blossoms.

'They will be ripe by the time I am well,' she said, the sunlight of memory coming out upon her face. Then having touched the wet blossoms with her finger-tips, she dropped them quickly back into the plate.

'How cold they are!' she said, as a shiver ran through her. At the same time she looked quickly at me, her eyes grown dark with dread.

I set the plate hastily down, and she put her hands in mine to warm them.

VII

MONTH has gone by since Georgiana passed away.

To-day, for the first time, I went back to the woods. It was pleasant to be surrounded again by the ever-living earth that feels no loss and has no memory; that was sere yesterday, is green to-day, will be sere again to-morrow, then green once more; that pauses not for wounds and wrecks, nor lingers over death and change; but onward, ever onward, along the groove of law, passes from its red origin in universal flame to its white end in universal snow.

And yet, as I approached the edge of the forest, it was as though an invisible company of influences came gently forth to meet me and sought to draw

me back into their old friendship. I found myself stroking the trunks of the trees as I would throw my arm around the shoulders of a tried comrade; I drew down the branches and plunged my face into the new leaves as into a tonic stream.

Yesterday a wind storm swept this neighbourhood. Later, deep in the woods, I came upon an elm that had been struck by a bolt at the top. Nearly half the trunk had been torn away; and one huge limb lay across my path.

As I stood looking at it, the single note of a bird fell on my ear—always the same note, low, quiet, regular, devoid of feeling, as though the bird had been stunned and were trying to say: *What can I do? What can I do? What can I do?*

I knew what that note meant. It was the note with which a bird now and then lingers around the scene of the central tragedy of its life.

After a long search I found the nest, crushed against the ground under the huge limb, and a few feet from it, in the act of trying to escape, the male. The female, sitting meantime on the end of a bough near by, watched me incuriously, and with no change in that quiet, regular, careless note—she knew only too well that he was past my harming. The plan of their life had reached an end in early summer.

I sat down near by for a while, thinking of the universal tragedy of the nest.

It was the second time to-day that this divine wastage in nature had forced itself on my thought, and this morning the spectacle was on a scale of tragic greatness beyond anything that has ever touched human life in this part of the country: Mr. Clay was buried amid the long, sad blare of music, the tolling of bells, the roll of drums, the boom of cannon, and the grief of thousands upon thousands of people—a vast and solemn pageant, yet as nothing to the multitudes that will attend afar. For him this day the flags of nations will fly half-mast; and the truly great men of the world, wherever the tidings may reach them of his passing, will stand awe-stricken that one of their superhuman company has been too soon withdrawn.

Too soon withdrawn! Therein is the tragedy of the nest, the wastage of the strong, the law of loss, whose reign on earth is unending, but whose right to reign no creature, brute nor human, ever acknowledges.

The death of Mr. Clay is one of the many things that are happening to change all that made up my life with Georgiana. She was a true hero-worshipper, and she worshipped him. I no less. Now that he is dead, I feel as much lonelier as a soldier feels whose chosen tent-mate and whose General have fallen on the field together.

As I turned away from the overcrowded town

this afternoon towards the woods and was confronted by the wreck of the storm, my thoughts being yet full of Mr. Clay, of his enemies and disappointment, there rose before my mind a scene such as Audubon may once have witnessed :—

The light of day is dying over the forests of the upper Mississippi. The silence of high space falls upon the vast stream. On a thunder-blasted tree-top near the western bank sits a lone, stern figure waiting for its lordliest prey — the eagle waiting for the swan. Long the stillness continues among the rocks, the tree-tops, and above the river. But far away in the north a white shape is floating nearer. At last it comes into sight, flying heavily, for it is already weary, being already wounded. The next moment the cry of its coming is heard echoing onward and downward upon the silent woods. Instantly the mighty watcher on the summit is alert and tense ; and as the great snowy image of the swan floats by, in mid-air and midway of the broad expanse of water, he meets it. No battle is fought up there — the two are not well matched ; and thus, separated from all that is little and struggling far above all that is low, with the daylight dying on his spotlessness, the swan received the blow in its heart.

So came Death to the great Commoner.

Oh, Georgiana ! I do not think of Death as

ever having come to you. I think of you as some strangely beautiful white being that one day rose out of these earthly marshes where hunts the dark Fowler, and uttering your note of divine farewell, spread your wings towards the open sea of eternity, there to wait my coming.

VIII

IT is a year and four months since Georgiana left me, and now everything goes on much as it did before she came. The family have moved back to their home in Henderson, returning like a little company of travellers who have lost their guide. Sylvia has already married; her brother writes me that he is soon to be; the mother visits me and my child, yearningly, but seldom, on account of her delicate health; and thus our lives grow always more apart. No one takes their place, the house having passed to people with whom, beyond all neighbourly civilities, I have

naught to do. Nowadays as I stroll around my garden with my little boy in my arms, strange faces look down upon us out of Georgiana's window.

And I have long since gone back to Nature. When the harvest has been gathered from our strong, true land, a growth comes on which late in the year causes the earth to regain somewhat of its old greenness. New blades spring up in the stubble of the wheat; the beeless clover runs and blossoms; far and wide over the meadows flow the tufted billows of the grass; and in the woods the oak-tree drops the purple and brown of his leaf and mast upon the verdure of June. Everywhere a second spring puts forth between summer gone and winter nearing. It is the overflow of plenty beyond the filling of the barns. It is a wave of life following quickly upon the one that broke bountifully at our feet. It is nature's refusal to be once reaped and so to end.

The math: then the aftermath.

Upon the Kentucky landscape during these October days there lies this later youth of the year, calm, deep, vigorous. And as I spend much time in it for the fine fresh work it brings to hand and thought, I feel that in my way I am part of it, that I can match the aftermath of nature with the aftermath of my life. The Harvest passed over my fields, leaving them bare; they are green again up to the winter's edge.

The thought has now come into my mind that I shall lay aside these pages for my son to ponder if he should ever grow old enough to value what he reads. They will give him some account of how his father and mother met in the old time, of their courting days, of their happy life together. And since it becomes more probable that there will be a war, and that I might not be living to speak to him of his mother in ways not written here, I shall set down one thing about her which I pray he may take well to heart. He ought to know and to remember this : that his life was the price of hers ; she was extinguished that he might shine, and he owes it to her that the flame of his torch be as white as the altar's from which it was kindled.

Perhaps the most remarkable thing, then, in the character of his mother—which, please God, he will have, or, getting all things else, he can never be a gentleman—was honour. It shone from her countenance, it ran like melody in her voice, it made her eyes the most beautiful in expression that I have ever seen, it enveloped her person and demeanour with spiritual grace. Honour in what are called the little things of life, honour not as women commonly understand it, but as the best of men understand it—that his mother had. It was the crystalline, unshakable rock upon which the somewhat fragile and never to be completed structure of her life was reared.

If he be anything of a philosopher, he may reason that this trait must have made his mother too serious and too hard. Let him think again. It was the very core of soundness in her that kept her gay and sweet. I have often likened her mind to the sky in its power of changeableness from radiant joyousness to sober calm; but oftenest it was like the vault of April, whose drops quicken what they may fall upon; and she was of a soft-heartedness that ruled her absolutely—but only to the unyielding edge of honour. Yet she did not escape this charge of being both hard and serious upon the part of men and women who were used to the laxness of small misdemeanours, and felt ill at ease before the terrifying truth that she was a lady.

Beyond this single trait of hers—which, if it please God that he inherit it, may he keep though he lose everything else—I set nothing further down for his remembrance, since naught could come of my writing. By words I could no more give him an idea of what his mother was than I could point him to a few measures of wheat and bid him behold a living harvest.

Upon these fields of cool October greenness there rises out of the earth a low, sturdy weed. Upon the top of this weed small white blossoms open as still as stars of frost. Upon these blos-

soms lies a fragrance so pure and wholesome that the searching sense is never cloyed, never satisfied. Years after the blossoms are dried and yellow and the leaves withered and gone, this wholesome fragrance lasts. The common people, who often put their hopes into their names, call it life-everlasting. Sometimes they make themselves pillows of it for its virtue of bringing a quiet sleep.

This plant is blooming out now, and nightly as I wend homeward I pluck a handful of it, gathering along with its life the tranquil sunshine, the autumnal notes of the cardinal passing to better lands, and all the healthful influences of the fields. I shall make me a tribute of it to the memory of her undying sweetness.

If God wills, when I fall asleep for good I shall lay my head beside hers on the bosom of the Life Everlasting.

THE END

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